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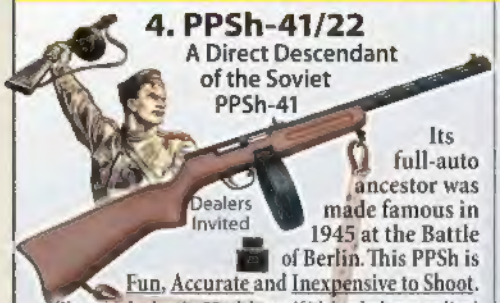

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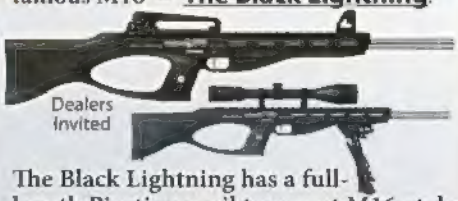

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Cover: A Russian soldier photographed during the Battle of Kursk in 1943. See our photo feature on Russian snipers for more on the Eastern Front, page 60. Photo: akg-images / RIA Novosti.

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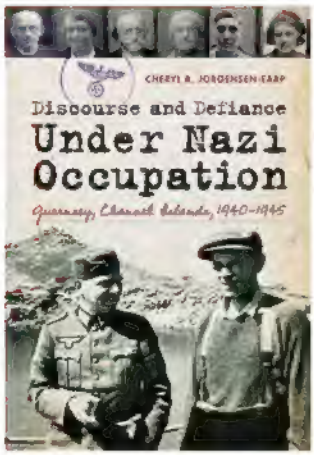

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Cheryl R. Jorgensen-Earp

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Editorial

Nicholas Oresko Leaves a Brave Legacy.

ON OCTOBER 4, 2013, NICHOLAS ORESK O PASSED AWAY IN AN ENGLEWOOD, New Jersey hospital at the age of 96. He had fallen at the assisted living facility where he lived and was in surgery for a broken femur at the time of his death.

Oresko was the oldest living recipient of the Medal of Honor when he died. He was a platoon sergeant in Company C, 302nd Infantry Regiment, 94th Division. The 94th had come ashore in France three months after the Normandy invasion and been involved in clearing pockets of German resistance in northern France as Allied spearheads pushed eastward toward the German frontier.

In December 1944, the 90th Infantry Division was pulled out of the line and replaced by the 94th in General George S. Patton, Jr.'s Third Army, relieving troops that had been hard pressed during the recent Battle of the Bulge. The division occupied territory in the Saar, west of the fortified Siegfried Line opposite the German 11th Panzer Division.

On January 23, 1945, just five days after his 28th birthday, Master Sergeant Oresko was leading a platoon of GIs near the town of Tettingen, Germany. When the Americans encountered stiff resistance, Oresko sprang into action. Pinned down by machine-gun fire on both flanks, the patrol could neither advance nor withdraw. Under heavy fire, Oresko rushed an enemy bunker, tossed in a grenade, and then finished off those enemy soldiers who survived the blast with his M-1 rifle. Immediately, a second machine gun opened fire, wounding Oresko in the hip.

Oresko refused to be evacuated and resumed command of the platoon, advancing at its head. Again under heavy fire, he ordered his men to halt and moved forward alone against a second German bunker. With another grenade followed up by rifle fire, he silenced the second bunker.

President Harry Truman presented the Medal of Honor to Oresko at the White House on October 30, 1945. His citation read in part: "Although weak from loss of blood, he refused to be evacuated until assured the mission was successfully accomplished. Through quick thinking, indomitable courage, and unswerving devotion to the attack in the face of bitter resistance and while wounded, M/Sgt. Oresko killed 12 Germans, prevented a delay in the assault, and made it possible for Company C to obtain its objective with minimum casualties."

Oresko had been wounded four times in the span of just a few minutes. Years later in an interview with the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, he said that he and his late wife had returned in 1952 to the place of his heroics. "It was covered with bushes, but it was a good feeling to visit the place," he said. "It felt good, but sad."

His memories of that day long ago remained vivid, and the hip wound reminded him of it regularly. "After a while, you're numb ... I just did what I had to do," he commented, noting that instinct had kicked in during the fight. As for the wound, he remarked, "I still sometimes have pain from it."

In recent years, Oresko had become a familiar sight, appearing at veterans events and in numerous parades. He had worked in the claims department of the Veterans Administration and retired in 1978. In 2010, Bayonne School #14 was renamed in his honor.

When Oresko died, he had no immediate family. He lived alone.

During his last days, current members of the military, local veterans, and friends stayed with him. They had learned of the ailing hero's condition when a friend wrote about it on Facebook. They came in tribute to Nicholas Oresko's heroism and sacrifice 69 years ago.

Michael E. Haskew

WWII HISTORY

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CARL A. GNAM, JR.
Editorial Director, Founder

MICHAEL E. HASKEW
Editor

LAURA CLEVELAND
Managing Editor

SAMANTHA DETULLEO
Art Director

CONTRIBUTORS:
Arnold Blumberg, Don A. Gregory, Michael D. Hull, Kevin M. Hymel, David H. Lippman, Joseph Luster, Christopher Miskimon, Tom Yarborough

ADVERTISING OFFICE:
BEN BOYLES
Advertising Manager
(570) 322-7848, ext. 110
benjaminb@sovhomestead.com

Advertising Sales
LINDA GALLIHER
(570) 322-7848, ext. 160
lgalliher@sovhomestead.com

MARK HINTZ
Chief Executive Officer

KEN FORNWALT
Data Processing Director

JANINE MILLER
Subscription Customer Service
sovereign@publishersserviceassociates.com
(570) 322-7848, ext. 164

CURTIS CIRCULATION COMPANY
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1000 Commerce Park Drive, Suite 300
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By David Sears

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American Ace Guerrilla

Fighter pilot ALex Vraciu fought along with Filipino guerrillas on the ground and in the air against Japanese planes.

ON JUNE 23, 1944, LIEUTEN ANT (J.G.) ALEX VRACIU POSED FOR A PHO TO WITH Vice Admiral Marc Mitscher, commander of Task Force 58, aboard the aircraft carrier *Lexington*. The two stood atop the starboard wing of Alex's Hellcat, the diminutive "Pete" Mitscher wearing his usual khakis and idiosyncratic lobsterman's hat, Alex his flight gear. Displayed between them, just below the Hellcat's canopy, were 19 rising sun decals emblematic of Alex's aerial victory count. Just one kill shy of being a quadruple ace, Alex, at age 25, was indisputably the U.S. Navy's leading fighter ace.

Four days earlier, Alex had posed for a more candid shot. On June 19, flying his Grumman F6F Hellcat as a member of *Lexington*'s Fighting Squadron 16 (VF-16), Alex splashed six Japanese aircraft in the space of eight minutes using just 360 .50-caliber rounds. Back aboard *Lexington*, he flashed a wide grin and extended six gloved fingers for an image that became part of the legend and lore of the Great Marianas Turkey Shoot during the Battle of the Philippine Sea. During the one-sided daylong melee, U.S. Navy pilots and shipboard gunners destroyed more than 300 Japanese aircraft against the loss of about 30 of their own.

Though Alex now held the Navy ace lead by a comfortable margin, other equally aggressive aviators were gaining. One still distant but fast closing competitor was 34-year-old Commander David "Dashing Dave" McCampbell, the commander of *Essex*-based VF-15. McCampbell had begun June 19 with two confirmed kills but had increased his total to nine by nightfall. And very soon, for a time at least, Alex would be sidelined. A few days after the Mitscher photo op, Alex and the other Fighting 16 pilots stood down. Ferried to Pearl Harbor aboard the carrier *Enterprise*, squadron personnel boarded the escort carrier *Makin Island* bound for San Diego and 30 days' leave.

The Navy devised a number of possible gimmicks to showcase its returning top ace. Alex, newly promoted to full lieutenant, was offered the chance to fly a captured Japanese Mitsubishi Zero on a national tour. There was also talk of pairing Alex with Lieutenant Cook Cleland, a Bombing 16 (VB-16) Dauntless dive bomber aviator, for a War Bond drive, each piloting the aircraft he had flown in the Pacific. The ideas were intriguing, but Alex's main goal was to get back into action. "I kept saying [with outsized fighter pilot swagger, Alex later admitted], 'I don't want to talk to a bunch of draft dodgers!'"

Meanwhile, Alex made full use of his leave time. On August 6, he was feted with a parade and stadium reception in his hometown of East Chicago, Indiana. More important, Alex found, wooed, and wed Kathryn Horn, a girl he had known since childhood. Kathryn had blossomed into an incredible beauty during Alex's time away in college, flight training, and then the war.

But not even whirlwind romance curbed Alex's impulse to return to the Pacific. After a honeymoon in New York, he was posted temporarily to Jacksonville, Florida, where an accommodating admiral interceded with Washington to get him orders back to the fleet. The need for fighter pilots was urgent. The Japanese Kamikaze threat was emerging, and with the Japanese surface fleet mortally wounded, the Navy was bolstering fighting squadrons and scaling back on bombing and torpedo squadrons. Adding to Alex's personal sense of urgency was the fact that he was no

U.S. Navy fighter ace Alex Vraciu stands next to the cockpit of his Grumman F6F Hellcat fighter plane prior to a mission. On the Hellcat's fuselage are rising sun emblems representing nine confirmed aerial kills. Vraciu finished the war with 19 victories.

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longer the Navy's lead ace. On October 21, Dave McCampbell surpassed Alex with his 20th aerial combat victory. Three days later, "Dashing Dave" claimed nine more in an aerial combat environment that had evolved into a shooting gallery.

Alex initially received orders to VF-19, the same squadron that had replaced VF-16 just months before. But when Alex finally reached *Lexington*'s forward operating base at Ulithi, he learned a November 5 Kamikaze strike had knocked the carrier out of commission and VF-19 was homeward bound. In his determination to stay and fight, Alex benefited from a second intercession, this time by *Lexington* commanding officer Ernest Litch, who arranged a transfer to the newly arrived VF-20 aboard *Enterprise*. Alex was finally poised to return to the ace race.

On December 14, 1944, Alex got started with two combat sweeps, his first since early July, around Luzon's Clark Field, part of the campaign to soften up Japanese aerial defenses before invading Mindoro, another major Philippine island. An early morning hop involved mostly ground strafing because there were few Japanese aircraft aloft. Alex burned a Nakajima Ki-44 Tojo parked at Angeles Field, a kill that did not count in his aerial total.

A second late morning hop was producing more of the same, destruction of a grounded Mitsubishi G4M Betty at Clark and two Tojos at Tala Field. Then, things suddenly went wrong. While pulling out of his last strafing run at Tala Field, Alex's Hellcat took a hit. Oil started gushing out of a hole just above his oil tank and began spraying into the cockpit. Oil pressure dropped steadily. "I knew that I'd had it," he recalled.

Alex climbed to 900 feet and turned west, following advice from the *Enterprise* intelligence officer, to get away from the lowlands in the direction of volcanic Mount Pinatubo. After trimming his aircraft and opening the canopy, Alex tossed items from his plotting board and flight suit pockets, things he did not want to have on him when he reached the ground.

Climbing out on the wing, Alex clung impulsively to the side of his Hellcat cockpit for a few seconds, what seemed to him an eternity, so that he could get farther away from the lowlands. It was about noon. He judged his altitude to be down to 400 feet. Finally, when the plane started to feel mushy—about to stall—Alex let go, raising his hands as he tumbled free, hoping to fend off a blow from the leading edge of his horizontal stabilizer. "Alex," he remembered thinking, "what have you got yourself into now?"

Following a mission, Lieutenant (j.g.) Alex Vraciu (left) chats with Rear Admiral Alfred Montgomery, recounting details of an encounter with the Japanese.

Alex hit the ground hard. He had not even fully swung in his risers or been able to turn for a landing going with the wind. Though jarred and dazed, he already had his "mind made up that I was not going to be captured." He drew his .45-caliber pistol and readied it as he saw men running toward him.

Knowing he was down in Japanese-held territory, Alex was conditioned to think that anyone he saw was the enemy. But these men had their hands raised, shouting, "Filipino! Filipino! No shoot!" Fortunately, Alex held his fire. "In no time at all, they got me out of my oil-soaked suit and helmet, stuck a straw hat on my head, and had me put on a shirt and a pair of pants—[so tight that] I could only get the bottom two buttons done up."

Their leader, a young Filipino guerrilla named Luis Ramos, hurried Alex along. The Japanese were in hot pursuit. Equipped with his .45-caliber, knife, canteen, supply of atabrine tablets, and a money package, Vraciu began his tour as an American ace guerrilla in the Philippines, all recorded in a remarkable day-to-day diary that he shared with this author.

After conquering the Philippines in the first months of the Pacific War, the Japanese made abortive efforts to persuade the people to embrace the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Failing at this, the Japanese turned to arrests (for "baneful action"), punitive expeditions, and summary executions to stem mounting opposition. However, the roughly 7,000 islands of the Philippines spread across 1,000 miles of ocean made it impossible for the Japanese to garrison and control more than key populated towns.

At the same time, with the Philippine Constabulary demobilized, parties of marauding bandits began looting the countryside and demanding tribute from defenseless farmers. The local vigilante groups that formed to combat these raiders eventually combined forces with escaped American and Filipino soldiers to create the core of the islands' ultimately substantial resistance movement.

It was early 1943 before clandestine operations mounted by General Douglas MacArthur's Southwest Pacific Area (SWPA) command could begin assisting and integrating major guerrilla commands. Clandestine penetration missions by American and Filipino operatives identified four classes of units: those built around a nucleus of U.S. and Philippine Army troops; those of purely local origin formed to combat uncontrolled banditry; those that were outgrowths of prewar political organizations; and a few lingering bands of roving outlaws.

For most of the war, Luzon, with its heavy concentrations of Japanese troops, infrastructure, and counterintelligence was "an island too far." It was not until mid-1944 that SWPA agents managed to contact American guerrilla commanders in southern and central Luzon, and it was September before cargo submarines could infiltrate radio equipment and supplies.

Alex Vraciu, it turned out, had parachuted into a disorganized and contested realm outside the jurisdiction of two well-established Luzon guerrilla forces regional commands, U.S. Army Major Bernard L. Anderson's eastern region and Major Robert Lapham's central region.

According to Luis Ramos, Alex had landed on the Ramos family farm, part of the South Tarlac Military District and just a short distance from the enemy-held town of Capas in Tarlac Province. Hoping to link up with Captain Alfred Bruce, a U.S. Army MP and Bataan escapee turned guerrilla leader and South Tarlac commander, the rescuers led Alex on an 18-kilometer trek, only to backtrack six kilometers when they learned that Bruce, fearing an imminent Japanese raid, had retreated farther into the hills. The party was joined that day by Filipino guerrilla Major Alberto Q. Stockton, who told Alex of burying the remains of VF-20 squadron mate Lieutenant (j.g.) D.N. Baker, who had also been shot down by flak.

By noon on the 16th, the group finally reached Captain Bruce's new camp, where Alex encountered another naval aviator, Lieutenant F. "Grassy" Grassbaugh, a TBF Avenger pilot from *Hornet*'s Torpedo 11 (VT-11) who had been shot down on November 6. They were in Negrito territory now, a region populated by small, dark-skinned aboriginal tribesmen that Alex learned to call Balugas.

Bruce's camp offered welcome comforts, a chance to bathe and eat (chicken, duck, wild

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pork, rice, corn, and bananas), and access to books and paper scraps for keeping a diary. Alex turned over his money package to Bruce and, along with the rest of the sizable band and their Baluga allies, hunkered down to await the expected American invasion of Luzon.

Documents indicate that Bruce's South Tarlac District reported to an Army lieutenant colonel named Wright via Wright's executive officer, another lieutenant colonel named P.D. Calyers. Bruce's immediate band seemed organized, but they were poorly armed and had practically no ammunition. Because of constant Japanese pressure, they could do little more than evade and lay low.

Confirmation came from messengers that Mindoro had been invaded, and Al Bruce predicted an imminent landing at Lingayen Gulf. Alex learned the bearded, gin-drinking Bruce had experienced his share of close calls with the Japanese. Once Bruce had watched as a fellow American, a tanker lieutenant named John Hart, shot himself in the head rather than be captured. Alex also learned there was a heavy price on his own head, one being paid by innocent Filipinos. Matter-of-fact reports told of Capas villagers being killed by the Japanese in an effort to extract information about the newly downed pilot. Under the circumstance, unless the Japanese got too close Bruce planned to sit tight to await the American landing. Except for a December 22 bombing run by two dozen Army Consolidated B-24 Liberators, the next days produced little evidence of a pending offensive.

Though he endured a Christmas Eve bout of the "drizzles," and his atabrine supply was dwindling, Alex's health and appetite remained strong. Alex received gifts of two fresh shirts and two pairs of pants as tight as before and with inseams five inches too short. More welcome still was a ringside view of 45 minutes of aerial dogfights between Army Lockheed P-38 Lightning fighters and Japanese Jacks, during which six aircraft, one American and five Japanese, crashed.

Alex's mood blended anticipation, envy, and frustration as he watched the fighting overhead. On December 26, his diary reports that clouds obscured dogfights ("DAMMIT!") and records his disdain for the all too easily routed "WILD EAGLES OF JAPAN" as well as their "ANTI-AIRCRAP" ground gunners. Over the next days, Alex took four hopeful potshots with his .45 at formations of twin-engine Sally bombers flying directly overhead. He wrote that he "could well use a gunsight, mil reticule and six fifties. Always wanted to see lots of Jap planes & am now getting the opportunity. But what a way!" After those four futile shots, he decided to conserve his remaining rounds.

Lieutenant Vrooie shows off a captured Japanese officer's sword to fellow Navy pilots aboard a carrier after his return from behind enemy lines on Luzon. After his Navy fighter was downed by antiaircraft fire over the Philippines, Vrooie joined a band of guerrillas and participated in operations against the enemy.

Alex the ace also displayed a proprietary and predictably biased interest in how his own side was performing. At midday on January 4, 1945, he watched in exasperation as "just like Army fliers," the pilots of a dozen P-38s cruising over the valley below "missed a glorious opportunity to annihilate 9 Jap planes flying low.... Flew right over them."

Air action, both Navy fighters and Army bombers, was intense on the 6th and, despite rainy weather, on the 7th as well. At midmorning on the 7th came the "oddest sight I've seen": more than 100 Army twin-engine A-26 Invader bombers streaking low across the valley, apparently bound for Clark. Then, just after noon, two dozen Hellcats bombed and strafed outlying fields. Adding to the noise of exploding bombs and chattering machines guns was the distant but deep sound of artillery fire to the northwest, what Alex assumed was naval bombardment

Artillery fire resumed early the next morning. Bruce now reported that the invasion was set for the 9th. Alex and Grassbaugh were joined by another downed Navy pilot, injured Ensign Allen Stover, member of a night-flying fighter squadron (VFN-19) from the carrier *Wasp*.

Concentrated naval shelling kicked off at midnight and continued well into the morning of the 9th. Finally convinced that the moment was at hand, Bruce decided to dispatch a guerrilla contingent to link up directly with the Americans. His intent was twofold: to assist the invaders with maps and intelligence, but also to ensure that his men got their share of desperately needed arms and ammunition. As Alex was the only American fit to travel, he would be going along as Bruce's representative. Alex was enthused and scarcely aware of the perils ahead.

Trekking north, the band skirted the foothills on the west side of the valley, using special caution as they approached and crossed any roads. The guerrillas traveled in stages, picking up more men as they went. They spent the first night at Major Stockton's satellite camp, where the party swelled to 75. The next morning they passed within a few kilometers of Camp O'Donnell, the terminus of the Bataan Death March, where thousands of American and Filipino prisoners were held in squalor. After reaching that day's destination, a Tarlac District camp run by Eliseo V. Mallari, Alex encountered a contingent of four more rescued American air crewman, including Ensign James W. Robinson, a VF-20 squadron mate who also had been shot down on December 14.

The four Americans declined to join Alex's journey as the force, now totaling nearly 100, set off early on January 12 headed for the large provincial municipality of Mayantoc. This leg took them into the domain of American guerrilla Albert S. Hendrickson, an Army private brevetted to captain, USAFFE. Alex would soon learn how factions like Hendrickson's jealously guarded territorial prerogatives and stewed on internecine grievances.

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The crisis moment came in Mayantoc on January 13. Alex's force had bivouacked in the town plaza while he met with Mayantoc's mayor and chief of police, a local guerrilla major named Asuncion, and the American wife of a native villager. The party was on its way to lunch when it was suddenly confronted by an armed and glowering guerrilla. "He had a Japanese pilot's helmet on his head, half-cocked, and his rifle partly pointed at me," remembered Vraciu.

"You Huk!" he shouted.

Huk was short for Hukbalahap, an anti-Japanese movement comprised of Central Luzon peasant farmers (the English translation was "The Nation's Army Against the Japanese"). Originally a prewar communist-oriented political organization, Hukbalahap had joined forces with the broad front of anti-Japanese resistance organizations. They would eventually mount a bloody post-World War II rebellion against the Philippine government, but even at this stage the Hukbalahap, which held sway over an area between Tarlac and Manila, had a reputation for fanaticism and terror exceeding the bounds of the struggle with the Japanese. To some, Huk meant a righteous popular movement. To others, though, it was a provocation.

Alex instinctively grasped his service pistol, but he could see the armed man was as much puzzled as belligerent. "No! I'm an American! What's going on here?" Then, getting no answer but sensing the man's indecision, Vraciu said, "Okay, take me to your leader."

The party was following the man toward the plaza when one of the guerrillas in Alex's group suddenly ran toward him and was just as suddenly felled by a burst of carbine fire. "[T]hey practically cut this man in half ... and he bled to death there in ten, fifteen seconds."

Still under fire and equal parts startled and infuriated, Alex (as documented in Eliseo Mallari's and Alberto Stockton's written reports to Alfred Bruce) ran forward shouting, "Stop firing! Stop firing!" The timely intervention likely prevented a full massacre. As it was, when the firing ceased, one of Bruce's USAFFE troops lay dead, another was wounded, and roughly a quarter of Alex's force had fled in panic.

The perpetrators of the incident turned out to be a contingent from Hendrickson's North Tarlac District under a Filipino officer named Cleto. A parlay of sorts ensued, though it mostly involved shouted insults. Cleto pronounced Bruce a thief and a brute "doing nothing but sleeping in the mountains." Hendrickson not Bruce, Cleto asserted, held jurisdiction over all of Tarlac Province.

Not surprisingly, Cleto's better armed contingent prevailed. All of Bruce's men except Alex and Stockton were disarmed and sent to confinement in several Mayantoc homes. They were subsequently released to return to Bruce's camp.

Alex's quest for freedom now detoured into the surreal. With Alex perched atop a small horse (which repeatedly turned to nip at his rider's legs), Cleto's men departed Mayantoc just after midnight January 15. They marched all night through countryside rife with Japanese to reach Hendrickson's headquarters near the town of Gerona. Arriving there at midmorning, Alex got his first glimpse of the South Tarlac commander. The impression was not good: "Capt. H. a drunkard all right. Big blow to boot. Hopped up on liquor and then sends out men to attack."

The next uneasy hours only deepened Alex's first impression. Hendrickson and his unruly subordinates lay passed out by midafternoon. Belligerent and often incoherent, Hendrickson ruled with a heavy, impulsive hand. "He was living like a Capone off the land," threatening to betray Filipinos who did not meet demands for food and liquor as "pro-Jap" when the Americans arrived. Meanwhile, Hendrickson seemed content to wait for MacArthur's

advancing troops, almost as if they should report to him.

January 16 brought an alert. A sizable Japanese force was reported bound for a river crossing near Hendrickson's camp. Armed with a carbine and 75 rounds of ammunition, Alex joined a tense but anticlimactic night-long vigil. He was stunned by his unlikely transformation from aerial knight to jungle ground pounder. "I'm laying on my stomach on the side of this river and waiting for the Japanese. I said to myself: 'What's a good fighter pilot doing on his stomach in the middle of this Godforsaken country…?'"

By the time the sleepless men straggled back into Hendrickson's camp the following morning, word finally came by runner that American GIs would be reaching Panique, a town north of Gerona, by midafternoon. Hendrickson was at last disposed to move and determined to make a grand show of it.

As it set out on the afternoon of the 17th and moved north on the road to Panique, Hendrickson's procession took on a quixotic air. A horse-mounted Hendrickson led the parade—Alex and a few others were also on saddleback—with guerrillas on foot behind. Flags—American, Philippine, and even guerrilla—fluttered, and a bugler trumpeted raucously. The clamor inevitably attracted followers, mostly women, children, and dogs from the villages en route. Just outside Panique, the procession encountered its first American GI, a bewildered checkpoint sentry from the Army's 129th Division, an Illinois outfit.

Cleared to continue, the parade finally reached advanced elements of the 129th, and a relieved Alex Vraciu was finally in American hands. An American brigadier general appeared to personally debrief him, a process that was repeated three times during the next few days as Alex passed through the lines

In a day or so, Alex boarded the amphibious command ship *Wasatch* off Lingayen. There he encountered a foreign correspondent who had been aboard the *Lexington* during the Marianas campaign. The reporter recognized Alex, scraggly beard notwithstanding, and in exchange for an exclusive story promised to get word of Alex's safe return to Kathryn.

Eventually Alex reached Ulithi and reported aboard the *Lexington*. With his Japanese officer sword and pistol and his store of firsthand accounts of Philippine resistance life, Alex was an instant shipboard celebrity. During *Lexington*'s transit back to Pearl Harbor, Alex, basking in the celebrity, clung stubbornly to his trimmed beard, a sore point with the *Lexington*'s executive officer. He simultaneously clung to his determination to stay in the Pacific, somehow arranging a transfer to another squadron for the inevitable carrier strikes on Japan's homeland

It was not to be. Because Alex knew names, conditions, and circumstances from his extended time behind enemy lines, his possible loss to the Japanese could simply not be risked. Alex's aerial combat days were done, his ace tally capped at 19. He was reassigned to the Naval Test Center, Patuxent River, Maryland, for the duration.

Alex Vraciu ended the Pacific War as the U.S. Navy's fourth-ranking fighter ace. He is now the nation's highest ranking surviving ace among all service branches. The Navy's overall leading ace was David McCampbell, a Medal of Honor recipient with a final combat total of 34 aerial kills, many of them in the closing days of the war. Meanwhile, Alex, though a recipient of the Navy Cross, has been nominated for but has never received the Medal of Honor

David Sears is a New Jersey-based historian, author, and former U.S. Navy officer. Pacific Air, *his most recent book, is a dramatic history of U.S. Navy aviation combat during World War II.*

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By Arnold Blumberg

All Photos National Archives

Late to the Party

The American M26 Pershing heavy tank arrived too late to dramatically impact the course of World War II.

"WE HAD BEEN ASSURED BY OUR OFFICERS BEFORE WE INVADED FRANCE IN 1944," recorded Bill Harris, "that our Sherman tanks could take care of any Nazi armor we met there."

Harris, a tank gunner in the U.S. 2nd Armored Division, had been told over and over again that the American M4 Sherman Medium Tank (the Allies' main battle tank) was as good, if not superior, to any armored fighting vehicle in the Wehrmacht's arsenal. Unfortunately for hundreds of U.S. and Allied tankers, including Harris, who had three Shermans shot from under him during the war in Western Europe, the nine savage weeks of fighting in the Normandy hedgerow country and the following dash across France proved the Sherman was far from the equal of the German Tiger, Panther, or even the outdated Panzer IV.

Regardless of what the "Dog Faces" were told about their tanks before the Normandy invasion, some of the high brass in the U.S. Army knew otherwise due to reports coming from the Eastern Front, where the Soviet Army was scrambling during 1943 to come up with an answer to the new German heavy MK VI Tiger tank and the medium MK V Panther. In mid-1942, even as the Sherman first entered mass production (48,000 would eventually be manufactured between 1942 and 1945), the United States Army Ordnance Department, in fits and starts, embarked on a search to improve the M4. This quest started with the design of the T20 prototype intended as an improved version of the Sherman.

During field trials at Aberdeen Proving Grounds, an M26 Pershing heavy tank negotiates a muddy hillside. The 90mm main weapon of the Pershing was comparable to the 88mm gun of the German Tiger tank; however, the Pershing reached European battlefields late in the war.

The main difference between the two armored vehicles was a lower silhouetted engine that made the T20's overall profile smaller than the existing M4. In addition, the T20 was to be armed with a new 76mm M1A1 cannon, as well as fitted with 3-inch frontal armor compared to the 2.5 inches found on the Sherman.

Other contenders as upgrades for the Sherman appeared in the form of the T22 and T23. The former was an M4 with a smaller two-man turret. The T23, like the T22, was a medium tank, but with an electrical transmission and cast iron turret able to house a 76mm M1A1 gun. Both were finally rejected (although the turret of the T23 would be used in all future 76mm upgunned Shermans) for two reasons. First, their designs required entirely new and separate training, maintenance, and repair procedures. Second, the Sherman with its 75mm gun—even by late 1943—was thought by the Army to be adequate enough for modern tank warfare. Besides, as many military men argued, it would be courting

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By Steven Wuzubia, Health Correspondent

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trouble to impose a new tank design on the armored force with the 1944 campaign in France only months away.

As the Army Ordnance Department looked to improve upon the existing Sherman model, others in the Army sought the M4's replacement altogether. Lt. Gen. Jacob L. Devers, who in 1943 directed the buildup of U.S. forces for the invasion of France and earlier was head of the Army's armored forces, advocated the replacement of the Sherman with a more powerful tank.

What Devers had in mind was the T26E1, America's first heavy armored fighting vehicle. The T26E1 had greater firepower and armored protection than the Sherman. The new tank, weighing 46 tons, sported a 90mm M3 cannon, 100mm frontal armor, a new type of gyrostabilizer, and a crew of five. Unfortunately, its 8-cylinder 500-horsepower Ford GAF engine and powertrain were not powerful enough for a tank of its weight. The engine was similar to the one used in the Sherman even though the Pershing was 26,000 pounds heavier. The result was that the machine's powerplant was not always reliable, and its maximum speed only 20 miles per hour.

During discussions in September and October 1943, Devers urged production of the T26 be accelerated and that 250 of them be produced immediately. Upon delivery he wanted the new model deployed on a scale of one T26 to every five M4s, much like the British intended to do with their 17-pounder mounted Sherman Firefly tanks.

Devers's quest to replace the M4 with the T26 was greatly hindered by a number of factors. First, the officers of the only two U.S. Army tank divisions to have seen combat in the war up to that point, the 1st and 2nd Armored Divisions, could not come to a consensus as to whether it would be more appropriate to go with a upgraded Sherman like the T23 or with a new heavy tank like the T26.

Second, Lt. Gen. Lesley McNair, head of U.S. Army Ground Forces, opposed the heavy tank concept. He had fathered the "tank destroyer doctrine" for the U.S. Army, which stated that enemy armor would be taken care of by tank destroyers such as the self-propelled M18 Hellcat, M10, and M36, while friendly armor would be relegated to supporting the infantry and exploiting breakthroughs in enemy lines. He also opposed the introduction of the T26 due to the need to prioritize war material shipped to Europe over the 3,000-mile supply line from the United States to England. Scarce amounts of shipping transport and time, according to McNair, could not be wasted on delivering an untested weapons system at that critical point in the war.

ABOVE: An M26 in action near the Rhine River in March 1945. The M26 Pershing heavy tank entered development with the U.S. Army in mid-1942, just as full production of the medium M4 Sherman tank was getting under way. BELOW: One of the M26 tanks from the 14th Tank Battalion that supported the capture of the Ludendorff Bridge over the Rhine on March 7, 1945.

McNair also argued that the Sherman appeared to be superior to the German tanks, the Panzer MK III and early versions of the MK IV, commonly encountered up to that time. Even the appearance of the German Tiger I failed to impress McNair with the need to counter that armored monster. He wrote Devers in the fall of 1943, "There is no indication that the 76mm antitank gun is inadequate against the German Mark VI (Tiger) tank."

McNair was the prime proponent of arming Shermans with a 76mm gun, thus alleviating the need for the 90mm-toting T26E1. Lastly, he reasoned, because of the dominance of his "tank destroyer doctrine" and the absence of any "tank versus tank combat theory" in the U.S. Army at the time, there was no guidance available for the employment of heavy tanks whose primary responsibility would be to fight other tanks

Pressing his view that the Pershing was needed, Devers went over McNair's head to Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall, who overruled McNair in December 1943 and authorized the production of 250 T26E1s. But manufacturing of the tank, ordered in January 1944 and designated production model T26E3, did not begin until November 1944. Between December 1944 and March 1945, a total of 436 units were produced with over 2,000 made by the end of 1945. In March 1945, the tank entered combat in Europe redesignated the M26 Pershing

By September 1944, the U.S. Army Ordnance Department realized the critical need for an American tank that could take on the German Panther and Tiger after reviewing battle reports of armored actions that had taken place in France since the Normandy landings in June. They clearly revealed the superiority of the German machines over the M4. Yet it was not until the end of the year that the first batch of T26E3 tanks, the first 40 off the production line, were ready to be committed to combat. Of these, 20 were immediately shipped overseas and the others moved to Fort Knox, Kentucky, to undergo extensive field testing. The new tanks arrived at the port of Antwerp, Belgium, in January 1945, and were the only Pershings in the European Theater. The next shipment was not expected until April.

To hurry along the introduction of the new machine and observe its performance in combat, a specialist team known as the Zebra Technical Mission, under Maj. Gen. Gladeon M. Barnes, head of the Army's Ordnance Department Research and Development Service, arrived in Paris on February 9. At a meeting with Supreme Allied Commander General Dwight D. Eisenhower, it was decided to get the new tanks into action as soon as possible. To that end, all 20 Pershings were assigned to the U.S. 1st Army and divided equally between the 3rd and 9th Armored Divisions. On February 17 the tanks were transported to an instruction facility near Aachen, Germany. By the 23rd, training for tank crews and maintenance personnel had been completed.

On February 26, one day after friendly infantry had secured a bridgehead over the east bank of the Roer River between the towns of Julich and Duren, the U.S. 3rd Armored Division broke out of the bridgehead and rushed eastward. The 3rd Armored, known as the "Spearhead" Division, commanded by Maj. Gen. Maurice Rose, operated as part of Lt. Gen. J. Lawton Collins's VII Corps, U.S. First Army.

The carefully planned American assault across the Roer River was designed to clear the territory west and up to the Rhine River. The main effort was to be made by the U.S. Ninth Army in the north with Collins's command from 1st Army guarding Ninth Army's right flank as far as the Rhine. After this was done, VII Corps was to capture the German city of Cologne, then head south along the Rhine to rejoin other First Army units pushing southeast to the Ahr River. Within hours of the American Roer offensive, the Pershing would undergo its baptism of fire.

In its drive for Cologne between the Roer and

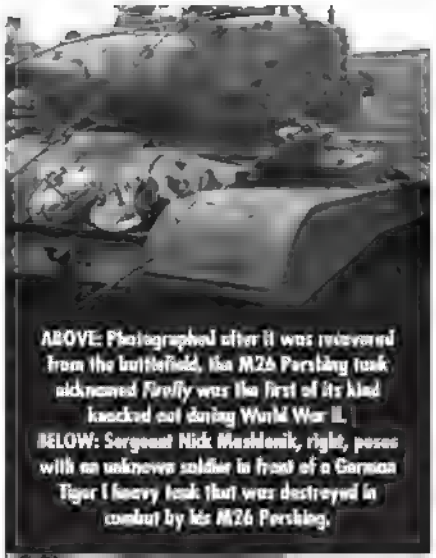
Rhine, VII Corps would traverse 35 miles of good tank country except for the area of the Hambach Forest, which stretched between Duren and Elsdorf. Defending the vast Hambach wooded region were two depleted infantry divisions and Lt. Gen. Fritz Bayerlein's ad hoc panzer corps made up of the remnants of the 9th and 11th Panzer Divisions and the 3rd Panzergrenadier Division.

In its drive toward from the Roer, 3rd Armored, with the 13th Infantry Regiment, 8th Infantry Division, attached, formed five mobile task forces, four of which were made up of one tank battalion, one armored infantry or standard infantry battalion, and a platoon of tank destroyers and engineers. The division's left was made up of two such task forces under Combat Command B leader Brig. Gen. Truman E. Boudinot. Their immediate objective was the important road junction at Elsdorf.

February 26, 1945, was a cold day with rain falling on the muddy secondary roads upon which the 3rd Armored Division was traveling. Boudinot's Combat Command B was split into two elements, Task Force Welborn on the left aiming for Elsdorf and Task Force Lovelady on the right heading for the village of Berrendorf. The former group was led by Lt. Col. John C. Welborn. Within his 1st Battalion, 33rd Armored Regiment was one of the new Pershing tanks, No. 38, christened *Fireball* by its crew. *Fireball* took the lead as Task Force Welborn bore down on Elsdorf. Ironically, this Pershing was originally one of Task Force Lovelady's complement of four attached to Company F, 2nd Battalion, 33rdArmored Regiment. How it ended up spearheading Welborn's advance has never been explained

The deserted village of Elsdorf had been prepared for defense by the Germans with log roadblocks set up at each western approach, a few antitank guns on the outskirts of town, and some German soldiers deployed within the hamlet.

As dusk arrived, *Fireball* reached the edge of Elsdorf and halted in front of a log barricade on the Steinstrass Road near a level railway crossing. Upon seeing the arrival of the Pershing, the German infantrymen panicked and quit their posts. This encouraged the Pershing's crew to try to cross the log barrier by driving over it. As the American tank tried to pass over the wooden obstacle, three Tiger I tanks from Heavy Panzer Battalion 301, attached to 9th Panzer Division, entered Elsdorf from the east and moved through the village toward its western end. Two of the Tigers stopped halfway through the village, while the third, No. 201, continued to scout ahead in the dark.



ABOVE: Photographed after it was recovered from the battlefield, the M26 Pershing tank nicknamed *Firefly* was the first of its kind knocked out during World War II.
BELOW: Sergeant Nick Mashlonik, right, poses with an unknown soldier in front of a German Tiger I heavy tank that was destroyed in combat by his M26 Pershing.

Meanwhile, as *Fireball* tried to barge its way over the log roadblock, an American M4 drove up and stopped just behind the Pershing. Suddenly, the night sky was torn by an explosion as the newly arrived Sherman was ripped apart by either German Panzerfaust or artillery fire. The flaming U.S. tank silhouetted *Fireball* perfectly in the darkness, allowing the Tiger to fire three fast rounds at only 100 yards. All three German shells hit the Pershing, knocking it out of action and killing two of its crew.

In seconds the first Pershing on the Western Front had been destroyed in action. However, the jubilation the Tiger crew must have felt at its victory over an unknown American tank type was short lived. Reversing violently to change position after shooting the American, the Tiger got hung up on a pile of rubble, its front still facing the roadblock. After several vain attempts were made to free the Tiger from its trap, the German crew abandoned the vehicle.

The U S. attack on Elsdorf continued next day with support from Allied fighter bombers. By noon, after fierce fighting, the village was cleared of the enemy. The afternoon of February 27 saw the Wehrmacht launch a counterattack to retake Elsdorf with four Tigers and two MK IVs leading the advance. Fortunately for the Americans, Task Force Lovelady, under Lt. Col. William B. Lovelady, was just to the southeast and in an excellent position to blunt the German attack.

Pershing No. 40, under the command of Sergeant Nick Mashlonik, moved forward. At 1,000 yards and while on the move, the Pershing killed a dug-in Tiger with four rapid high velocity armor-piercing rounds. Mashlonic was just getting started. He remembered, "Three other German armored vehicles were leaving Elsdorf and were on the road to my right. I waited until all of them were on the road with their rear ends exposed and then I picked off each one with one shell each. Just like shooting ducks." The sergeant's achievement confirmed the effectiveness of the Pershing's firepower.

By the end of the 27th, Elsdorf was firmly in American hands. This allowed division maintenance to retrieve *Fireball* and take it back to Duren for repairs. The tank returned to duty on March 7.

While one Pershing was lost at Elsdorf due to enemy action, another of Combat Command B, 3rd Armored Division, experienced mechanical trouble and was withdrawn from the front on March 1. It had broken down as it crossed a Bailey bridge over the Erft Canal four miles east of Elsdorf. That same day, Pershing No. 22, attached to Company A, 14th Tank Battalion, 9th Armored Division, was disabled by a 150mm artillery shell southeast of Duren, killing its commander.

On March 6, Pershing No. 25, from Company H, 33rd Armored Regiment, 3rd Armored Division, was knocked out of action in a northern suburb of Cologne by an 88mm round fired from a German Nashorn tank destroyer at 300 yards. The crew bailed out safely, but the hit set off the stored ammunition, burning out the turret. That same day, as the Americans tightened their grip on Cologne, elements of the 3rd Armored Division neared the Dom Cathedral in the city's center. One final short skirmish with a lone Panther tank in the cathedral square started as the German hit a Sherman tank, killing three crewmen. A Pershing down the street immediately reacted, exchanging cannon shots with the German. The Panther burst into flames after being struck three times. Two of its five crewmen were trapped in the vehicle and burned to death

While the tankers of the 3rd Armored Division, including the first Pershing tanks sent to Europe, saw fighting in World War II and completed the capture of the city of Cologne, others of the original 20 machines rushed into action in February 1945 were experiencing their own trials in combat. On the morning of March 7 in the Bonn-Remagen area about 13

miles northeast of the bridge at Remagen spanning the Rhine River, the new commander of Company A, 27th Armored Infantry Battalion, 9th Armored Division, Lieutenant Karl H. Timmermann, was called to the command post of the 14th Tank Battalion, which was spearheading the 9th Armored Division's move toward the Rhine. There the young junior officer was instructed that he and his company would act as the vanguard for the entire advance, and that Company A, 14th Tank Battalion, with its new Pershings, would support his unit

Timmermann's men soon started on their way toward the Rhine and the Ludendorff railway bridge that crossed it at Remagen. At 11 AM they ran in to an ambush as German infantry fired panzerfaust antitank weapons. In response, an M26 was brought to the head of the American column, where its cannon fire not only quickly dispersed the threatening enemy but forced their surrender as well. Once near the bridge at Remagen and seeing that the Ludendorff structure had not been destroyed by the Germans, Timmermann contacted his superiors. At 1 PM Brig. Gen. William M. Hodge, leader of Combat Command B, 9th Armored Division, arrived and ordered Timmermann to seize the town of Remagen and try to secure the bridge. Pershings provided fire support.

At 3:20 PM Timmermann moved up to the bridge and gave the traditional "Follow me" gesture. As he and his 120 men moved onto the span, a Pershing fired at one of the bridge towers ahead of the assault team to silence German machine-gun fire. Soon another Pershing opened up on an enemy machine-gun positioned on a half-submerged barge moored 200 yards upstream. With an American toehold on the east bank of the Rhine, the first U.S. tanks rolled across the great river at midnight. Although the Pershing crews insisted on crossing first, they were not authorized since the bridge was considered too weak to support the M26's weight. As a result, the first U.S. armor to cross the river was the lighter M4 Sherman along with even lighter tank destroyers.

With World War II in Europe nearing its conclusion, the Pershing tank displayed one last example of its battlefield prowess. On April 21, 1945, near the town of Dessau, Germany, at the junction of the Mulde and Elbe Rivers, a tank versus tank contest occurred. It was truly a heavyweight bout. An American Super Pershing slugged it out with a German King Tiger.

The U.S. tank was manned by an experienced crew under the command of Staff Sergeant Joseph Matira of Massachusetts. The brave and capable noncommissioned officer had one weakness. He was severely claustrophobic, and during any fighting he usually stood up in the turret of his vehicle firing the tank's .50-caliber machine gun. Although this habit exposed him to enemy fire, it allowed him a better view of his surroundings. His gunner was Corporal John "Jack" P. Irwin of Norristown, Pennsylvania. Matira had been in combat for nine straight months, while Irwin dropped out of high school to enlist in the U.S. Army in 1944. The 18-year-old Irwin was sent to Fort Knox, Kentucky, qualifying as a tank gunner. While at that station he worked on some of the 20 new Pershing tanks sent there for testing.

Matira and Irwin were with Company I, 33rd Armored Regiment, 3rd Armored Division. After joining Matira's M4 Sherman crew in March 1945, Irwin experienced a sustained string of combat actions. After driving 12 miles out of the American bridgehead at Remagen on March 25, Irwin's tank was hit in the turret by enemy fire. As part of Task Force Welborn, on the 26th Irwin's Sherman dueled with German 88mm antitank guns in the fight for the town of Altenkirchen. Moving 90 miles on March 28 to the town of Paderborn, Company I fought a vicious battle against German soldiers from the SS Panzer Replacement and Training Center located nearby. There Matira's Sherman got stuck on a heap of rubble and had to be abandoned. On March 30 near the town of Etteln in the Ruhr Valley, Irwin's tank was struck by fire from an enemy self-propelled gun. The entire crew bailed out, but the tank was not seriously damaged.

On April 1, Matira and Irwin were again fighting near Paderborn when their crew encountered a German Tiger I tank. The hits Matira's tank scored merely ricocheted off the Nazi tank. Finally, a high explosive shell forced the enemy crew to abandon the Tiger due to the concussion

After the fight at Paderborn, Task Force Welborn sped on to the Weser River, reaching it on April 7. Three days later the Sherman was disabled by panzerfaust fire in the village of Espchenrode near the Harz Mountains. That afternoon they received a replacement tank, a Super Pershing (T26E4). This machine, which had been in action before, was one of only two deployed to Europe during World War II. Additional armor protection had been installed, and it was equipped with a new long-barreled T15E1 90mm gun that was designed to outperform the high-velocity 88mm cannon found on the German Tiger I and King Tiger.

The 90mm gun could successfully penetrate 8.5 inches of armor sloped at 30 degrees from

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a distance of 1,000 yards. The gun had a muzzle velocity of 3,850 feet per second, 600 feet per second faster than the 88mm gun used by the German Tigers. The new gun was also found to be extremely reliable and accurate with good range. The tank's large tracks helped it move almost effortlessly through rough fields and muddy terrain.

By April 12 a score of German villages and towns along Task Force Welborn's advance had been fought over, captured, and left behind as the Americans moved eastward. In many of these actions Madira's tank had been hit, but the Super Pershing had sustained little damage. On April 14 Task Force Welborn crossed the Saale River heading for the Elbe River. As it rushed forward, Task Force Lovelady advanced to its south. The next objective for both combat teams, as well as the entire 3rd Armored Division, was the city of Dessau. Nearing Dessau Matria's tank was ordered to backtrack five miles and clear the American supply route, which had been interdicted by marauding German units. Using high-explosive and white phosphorous shells, the Super Pershing cleared the way and reopened the supply line.

From the 18th to the 20th, Task Force Welborn stood down while bitter fighting occurred in the villages south of Dessau. On April 21, the 3rd Armored Division initiated a four-pronged attack on Dessau. The Americans advanced from several directions, Task Force Hogan from the west, Task Force Boles and Task Force Orr from the southwest, and Task Force Welborn from the south. At the time the city was defended by soldiers of the Wehrmacht School of Combat Engineers and some SS units.

Task Force Welborn's approach to Dessau was blocked by concrete antitank barriers, which the U.S. tanks were not able to break through or climb over. Instead, the Americans used their guns to demolish the barriers, which proved to be a slow process. Once over the concrete obstacles, the tanks of Task Force Welborn, closely followed by the half-track-mounted soldiers of the 36th Armored Infantry Regiment, fanned out along the city streets.

Matria's Pershing reached an intersection and began to round the corner. Waiting in ambush just 600 yards away stood a German King Tiger tank. The German fired at the M26 but missed its mark as its shell went high. John Irwin reacted immediately, firing a high-explosive round at the enemy vehicle, which merely bounced off the German tank and then exploded in the air. The Pershing cannon had been loaded with high-explosive ammunition since the crew expected to be conducting combat against infantry rather than enemy armor within the city.

Irwin shouted for his loader to put an armor-piercing round in the gun. Before he could shoot, the American tank was hit by antitank fire, which did no damage to the Pershing. It was never discovered if the shot that hit Matira's tank had been fired by the Tiger or some other German weapon. The latter was most likely the case since a hit at that range from a King Tiger would likely have destroyed the U.S. tank.

Irwin then got off his second shot, which hit its target as the Tiger slowly moved forward over a rubble heap, exposing the German's thinly armored underbelly. The 90mm round hit near the enemy tank's ammunition hold resulting in a tremendous explosion, which blew the Tiger's turret loose and killed the crew. The contest between the American and German behemoths lasted only 20 seconds.

The next morning, the Super Pershing participated in repulsing a German counterattack in Dessau's center. The American encountered a Tiger tank that fired its 88mm gun. A German shot passed between the M26's tracks! Another German tank came on scene as Matria backed his vehicle into an entrance way that overlooked a road. As the German Panther approached, Irwin fired, disabling the Panther's drive sprocket and left sponson. A second shot slammed into the enemy tank's two-inch side armor, igniting gasoline and ammunition. The Panther became a flaming torch, its wreckage blocking the Pershing until it was towed away later. Within seconds, another German tank appeared, but before Irwin could get off a shot at the newcomer the Nazi crew, out of ammunition, abandoned its tank and surrendered.

The Battle for Dessau did not conclude until April 24. It was the last combat action the Pershing took part in during World War.

By mid-April 1945, a total of 185 new Pershings had arrived in the European Theater. Of these, 110 served with the 2nd, 3rd, 5th, 9th, and 11th Armored Divisions by war's end. There were 310 M26 tanks in theater on May 8, 1945 (VE-Day), of which 200 were actually delivered for frontline service.

It is safe to say that due to the difficulties involved in transporting the machines and training their crews, the only Pershings that could have seen sustained action were those 20 experimental models introduced in February 1945. As a result, since the Pershing arrived so late and in such small numbers, it had no major impact on the fighting on the Western Front.

Military historian Arnold Blumberg lives and writes from his home in Baltimore, Maryland.

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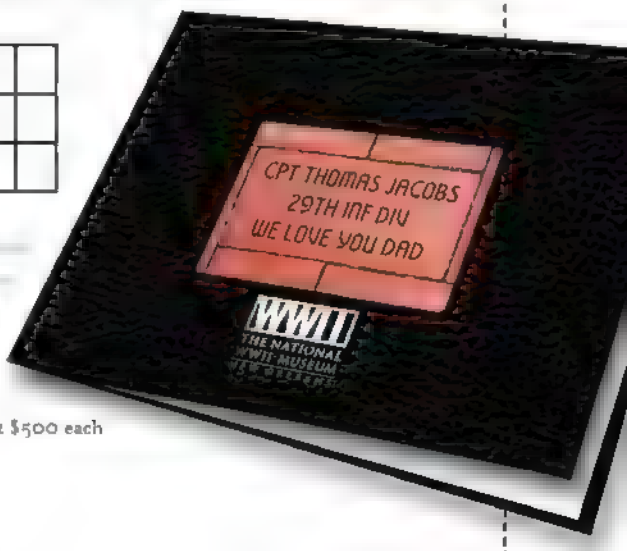

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Tragedy in Icy Seas

The sinking of a German liner resulted in the greatest loss of life on the high seas in history.

SNOW FLURRIES SWIRLED OUT OF THE DARKNESS OVER THE BALTIC SEA. Chunks of ice floated on the water, and lookouts shivered at their posts. The German ship MV *Wilhelm Gustloff* plowed through the choppy water, her cabins, decks, saloons, and even her drained swimming pool jammed with refugees.

It was the night of January 30, 1945, and disaster awaited her.

On land, Soviet armies, enraged by earlier German atrocities, were moving into Poland and Prussia from the east, avenging themselves against the military personnel and civilians they met. Fleeing before them, refugees were streaming into the German-held Baltic ports, clogging the docks, and mingling with the wounded soldiers left by German ambulance trains. Horses that had pulled the cars that brought them and dogs that had tagged along were abandoned and wandered through the city. The roads and railways to the west were regularly being cut.

The only way out was by sea.

The *Gustloff* along with other liners, fishing boats, cargo ships, pleasure craft, and other vessels had been pressed into service to evacuate these refugees and military personnel, military technicians, and wounded soldiers in an operation that has been called the German Dunkirk.

The German liner *Wilhelm Gustloff* is shown in the harbor of Hamburg, Germany, in 1938, the year the vessel was commissioned. The *Wilhelm Gustloff* was torpedoed by a Soviet submarine with great loss of civilian life.

But the *Gustloff* would not make it.

Not long after she began her journey west, she was spotted by the Russian submarine *S-13*, which launched three torpedoes. All three hit the *Gustloff*, and within an hour she sank taking down with her as many as 9,500 people. It is the largest known loss of life of any sinking in maritime history, a loss of life more than three and a half times the total of those in the sinkings of the *Titanic* and the *Lusitania* combined

From January to May 1945, as the Red Army advanced from the east, German refugees, military and civilian,were being evacuated through German-held ports on the Baltic Sea. Included among them were potential U-boat crews that had been training in the Bay of Danzig, wounded soldiers from the Eastern Front, Nazi officials, military families, and other civilians.

The evacuation, codenamed Operation Hannibal, was under the control of Admiral Karl Dönitz, who later succeeded Adolf Hitler as head of Nazi Germany. In that role, Dönitz would sign the Allied terms of unconditional surrender on May 8, 1945.

In January, however, he had taken charge of the evacuation and had requisitioned ships of all kinds, including 25 substantial cargo ships and 13 liners. One of those liners was the MV *Wilhelm Gustloff*. The ship had been built as the flagship of the German Labor Front and had been used by its Strength Through Joy organization to provide recreational and cultural activities for German functionaries and workers and to serve as a propaganda tool touting the glories of German power.

She was 684 feet long, 77.5 feet wide, weighed 25,484 gross tons, and could accommodate 1,465 passengers in 489 cabins. She was launched in May 1937 and was named after Wilhelm Gustloff, the head of the Nazi Party in Switzerland, who had been assassinated in 1936. Gustloff had been an ardent supporter of Hitler almost from the beginning of the latter's rise to power and came to be considered a Nazi martyr after his assassination.

The *Gustloff* had been pressed into service as a transport ship during the Spanish Civil War, was later converted to a hospital ship, and in 1940 was converted again, this time to a barracks ship for U-boat trainees in Gdynia, Poland, on the Bay of Danzig.

By early 1941, the Soviet advance westward had freed the Navy's submarine fleet, which had been bottled up in Leningrad

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and Kronstadt. The subs surged into the Baltic Sea and the Gulf of Finland with orders to attack any shipping they encountered. The Germans, however, did not consider the submarines a menace, believing they were few and badly handled. A greater danger, the Germans believed at the time, came from British torpedo planes and bombers as well as from mines.

The *Gustloff*'s original Operation Hannibal assignment was to carry to safety the 2nd Training Division of submarine recruits, men who had bunked on her during training. She was also to carry a number of women auxiliaries, some of whom had served in antiaircraft and artillery positions to free men for the front lines, and some wounded soldiers.

"We considered the *Wilhelm Gustloff* a safe, comfortable trip. It was for this reason that it became the first official evacuation ship for our girls," Wilhelmina Reitsch, who was in command of the 10,000 female naval auxiliaries in the area, later said. "Because road and rail transport was so dangerous at the time, it was considered best to send these girls on the *Gustloff*. The auxiliaries were all between 17 and 25 years old. We carefully sifted through the auxiliaries and gave seaborne priority to those who had family or other responsibilities."

As the ship awaited her orders to load passengers and leave Gdynia, there were daily bombing raids on shore, and the city's electricity and water systems had broken down. The dock area was jammed with refugees and wounded soldiers trying to escape to the West and cluttered with horse-drawn covered wagons that had brought them to the docks.

"There must have been 60,000 people on the docks," Walter Knust, the *Gustloff*'s second engineer, later said.

When the ship's gangways were finally let down, refugees charged the ship trying to get aboard, fighting for a place on what they considered the only hope they had of finding safety. The ship was finally pulled a few yards away from the dock to stop the rush, and those with precious boarding passes were taken by ferry to the far side of the ship and up a guarded gangway.

About 1 PM on January 30, the *Gustloff* cast off. Aboard were 6,050 people: 173 crewmembers, 918 naval officers and men, 373 women's naval auxiliaries, 162 wounded soldiers, and 4,424 refugees, including numerous women and children. It was windy and cold with hail bombarding the deck and the few passengers hardy enough to be outside. Bursts of snow mixed with the hail. Hunks of ice could be seen on the surface of the sea

Lifejackets had been provided for all, but there were not enough lifeboats. Over the years, as the ship stood at the dock serving as a barracks, a number of the boats had been borrowed for other uses around the harbor. Lifeboats and rafts aboard the *Gustloff* could, if the need arose, accommodate only 5,060 people.

The ship was forced to stop almost immediately after casting off, however, when it was surrounded by a flotilla of small boats filled with refugees pleading to be picked up. Some women were holding up their children. Giving in to the pleading, the *Gustloff*'s officers ordered boarding nets to be dropped from the ship, and refugees scrambled aboard. No one bothered to count them, but radio officer Rudi Lange later said, "I think I remember being told by one of the ship's officers to send a signal that another 2,000 people had come aboard."

That figure was probably an estimate at best, but if close it sent the *Gustloff*'s complement to about 8,000 people. Other investigators, however, have claimed that number is actually quite low and estimated that those aboard totaled as many as 10,582 passengers and crew. The exact number will never be known.

The *Gustloff* then left Gdynia harbor accompanied by the passenger liner *Hansa*, which was also filled with civilians and military personnel, and with two torpedo boats to serve as a meager escort. The *Hansa* and one of the torpedo boats soon developed engine problems, however, and were forced to turn back.

Over the years since the sinking, historians have argued about whether the *Gustloff* was a legitimate war target and whether her sinking should be classified as a war crime. Despite the wounded men on board, the *Gustloff* was not legally a hospital ship. She was armed with antiaircraft weapons and was also carrying a sizable number of military personnel. In addition, she was not marked as a hospital ship. She was a legitimate target.

Oddly, she also had two lead captains, one civilian and one military.

The military commander, Lt. Cmdr. Wilhelm Zahn, a submariner, argued that the ship should stay in deep water and make as much speed as possible either on a direct course or, preferably, zigzagging. He was overruled by the senior civilian captain, Friedrich Petersen, who argued that the ship could not maintain her top speed for long and was too large to hold a zigzag course. In addition, the ship was informed by radio of a number of German minesweepers in the area, and Zahn recommended turning on the ship's green and red navigation lights to avoid a collision in the dark. German intelligence had already informed the *Gustloff* that there were no known Soviet submarines or surface ships in the area.

National Archives

Photographed during sea trials in 1937, the *Wilhelm Gustloff* is accompanied by tugboats that rendered assistance entering and exiting harbors. Named for the assassinated leader of the Swiss Nazi Party, the liner was pressed into wartime service.

That report of no submarine activity was wrong, and the running lights would make the *Wilhelm Gustloff* easy to spot in the dark.

Meanwhile, the crowded conditions below decks had overwhelmed the ship's ventilation system, making it oppressively hot. To make themselves more comfortable, people began removing their lifejackets.

As the ship sailed 15 to 20 miles off Leba, Poland, the Soviet submarine *S-13* was prowling the area, and its commander, Captain Alexander Marinesko, was preparing to slip into the Bay of Danzig itself in hopes of finding targets.

"I decided," he later said, "that I would bring the war to them."

As the submarine headed for the bay, however, Marinesko noticed the running lights of the *Gustloff* and resolved to attack her on the surface, slipping close on the shore [port] side of the ship to fire torpedoes with greater accuracy. Snow flurries and clouds obscured the moon and helped hide the silhouette of the submarine against the darkness of the shore.

"They would not expect an attack from that direction," Marinesko remembered. "Their watch would be concentrating on looking out to sea."

The *S-13* worked itself around the ship and to fewer than 1,000 meters from the *Gustloff*. The torpedoes were set to run three meters below the surface. Marinesko fired.

Before leaving on patrol, *S-13*'s Petty Officer Andrei Pikhur had painted slogans on the boat's torpedoes. These torpedoes ran silently toward the *Gustloff* with the first, which had been labeled "For Motherland," striking the *Gustloff* near the bow. The second torpedo, marked "For Soviet people," hit just ahead of amidships, and the third torpedo, "For Leningrad," struck the engine room below the ship's funnel, cutting off electrical power. A fourth torpedo, "For Stalin," hung up in its tube.

The *Gustloff* lurched to starboard and then settled to port and began listing. Her nose was down. At first, some of the officers thought the ship had hit a mine, but Zahn, himself a submariner, realized the ship had been hit by three torpedoes. The engines had been knocked out, and the ship's telephone and public address systems were down. Those lucky enough to have cabins were able to quickly get out on the slanting deck, but below people were screaming and running around while alarm bells and sirens bellowed. Water poured into the ship's corridors, and panicked people waded through first knee-deep and then thigh-deep streams. Anyone who fell was trampled. The wounded and the many pregnant women aboard, lacking mobility, were trapped below.

Those who made it to the boat deck fought to get on the few lifeboats. Others jumped into the water. Many of the davits holding the lifeboats in place were coated with ice, and the inexperienced crew struggled to knock them free and launch the boats. Others boats capsized as they hit the water, dumping those aboard into the freezing Baltic, or snarled when being lowered, spilling their passengers.

Meanwhile, the ship's list to port continued to grow, and people began to slip and slide

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This artist's rendering depicts the attack on the *Wilhelm Gustloff* by the Soviet submarine S-13 on the night of January 30, 1945. Loaded with refugees and wounded German soldiers, the ship was torpedoed and went to the bottom of the Baltic Sea.

across the wet and icy deck into the water. Ironically, the PA system had been quickly repaired, and messages meant to reassure the panicked passengers continued to sound.

The main radio system was not operating, and water was pouring into the engine room. An emergency transmitter, which had a range of only 2,000 meters, was pressed into service, but it could not reach the naval headquarters. Its messages were picked up by the escorting torpedo boat, which then relayed them on its more powerful transmitter. But it transmitted the messages for help on a frequency reserved for warships. Valuable time was thus lost in notifying potential rescue ships.

Finally, the great ship's bulkheads and watertight doors gave way under the pressure of the water pouring into her, and she turned over on her port side, spilling those people still on the lower promenade deck against the windows, then out into the Baltic as the glass gave way. Others were caught and drowned.

On the bridge, 45 minutes after the torpedoing and with the ship listing 25 degrees, Zahn was overseeing the destruction of the ship's papers when steward Max Bonnet, wearing his white jacket, politely appeared with a tray and glasses offering the officers on the bridge "a final cognac."

The bridge officers drank their cognacs and returned to work. Shortly after that, the ship began her final slide to the bottom. Her boiler exploded, somehow reactivating her generators and lights as she slipped beneath the waves.

"Suddenly it seemed every light in the ship had come on," said passenger Ebbi von Aydell, who had been lucky enough to get aboard one of the lifeboats. "The whole ship was blazing with lights, and the sirens sounded out over the sea."

Another witness, Walter Knust's wife, Paula, also watched the *Gustloff*'s last moments from a lifeboat.

"I could clearly see the people still on board clinging to the rails. Even as she went under they were still hanging on and screaming. All around us were people swimming or just floating in the sea. I can still see their hands grasping at the sides of our boat," she remembered.

In less than an hour, the *Gustloff* was gone, sunk in 144 feet of water. The *Gustloff*'s escort boat and other ships in the area, including the German cruiser *Admiral Hipper*, converged on the area and began bringing aboard as many of the *Gustloff*'s survivors as they could.

In all, 1,063 people were rescued, including both of the ship's captains, but some of those rescued died later. In the panic that had followed the torpedo attack, a number of people were trampled and killed, and others were killed outright by the three torpedo blasts. The majority died, however, in the frigid Baltic water. The air temperature that night was no higher than 14 degrees Farenheit, and ice floes were forming on the surface of the sea. The actual number killed, like the actual number aboard the ship, is unknown but estimates range from about 7,000 to as many as 9,400 people.

Depth charges were also fired, which may have killed some of the people floating and swimming in the area. The sudden movements of some of the rescue ships trying to evade the submarine may have killed others.

The ships took many of those rescued west to Sassmitz on the German island of Rugen off the

Pomeranian coast. There they were met by the Danish hospital ship *Crown Prince Olav*. Others drifted for hours before being picked up by other vessels and taken to shore. A group of seven survivors, including one of the few naval auxiliary women to survive, was taken to Gdynia. Twenty-four hours after they had disembarked, these passengers were back in the same place they had left and were taken to the military hospital there. Of the seven only two were well enough to walk ashore under their own power.

The final rescue came at dawn when a Navy dispatch boat was edging through the ice. She had all but given up on finding any additional survivors when she came on a lifeboat with several people huddled aboard. Chief Petty Officer Werner Fisch jumped into the boat and it appeared that all the people on it were dead, apparently frozen to death. Looking further, however, he found buried in the mass of dead a baby who was still alive. Fisch took the child back to the dispatch boat and later adopted it.

After the sinking, Marinesko continued his patrol and in February sank another liner, the 14,660-ton *Steuben*, that was also being used in the evacuation. The *Steuben* went down with almost 4,000 wounded German soldiers, civilians, Army and Navy personnel, and crewmen aboard.

For its exploits in the Baltic, *S-13* was made a "Red Banner" boat, and every member of the crew was granted the Order of the Great Patriotic War.

As the war wound down, Marinesko wrote a book, *An Analysis of Torpedo Attacks by the S-13*, which was never published. The book did anger many of his superiors with its criticism of Soviet tactics and equipment. This, as well as Marinesko's outspoken views and less than circumspect behavior, led to his eventual dismissal from the service. Out of the Soviet Navy, he continued to get in trouble with the authorities and ended up being sentenced to a three-year term at a Siberian labor camp.

Zahn was called before a German naval board to answer for what had happened, but as the Third Reich collapsed no decision was rendered and no blame was ever placed for the ship's overcrowding or for the running lights that had made her so conspicuous.

Zahn spent the remainder of his life as a salesman, and civilian captain Petersen never went to sea again.

For weeks after January 20, 1945, frozen bodies washed up on the Baltic coasts.

Author Chuck Lyons has contributed to WWII History *on a variety of topics. He resides in Rochester, New York.*

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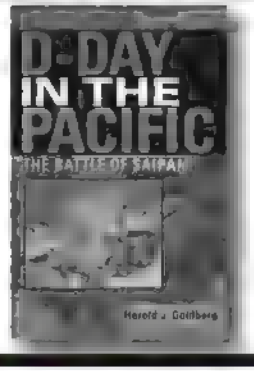

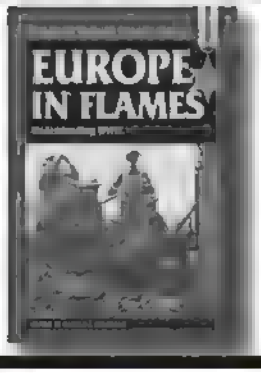

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By Michael D. Hull

All Photos National Archives

Exercise in Terror

A pre-invasion exercise at Slapton Sands went horribly wrong, and senior Allied commanders covered up the serious losses and potential breach of D-Day secrecy.

OPERATION BOLERO, THE MARSHALING OF ALLIED FORCES FOR THE PLANNED 1944 invasion of Normandy, was in full swing by late 1943, and much of England had been turned into a great armed camp.

While the British, Canadian, and Free French Armies trained in the east, south, and north, American armored, infantry, and airborne divisions were concentrated in the Midlands, the Southwest, and southern Wales. Across the meadows and farmlands of Dorset, Wiltshire, and Devon, thousands of young GIs made their new homes in Nissen huts and tents, griped about warm beer and the weather, and made friends with local folk in teashops and inns during off-duty hours.

They learned battlefield tactics in wide-scale maneuvers and sweated through grueling route marches while long columns of tanks, jeeps, trucks, and half-tracks rumbled through ancient villages and clogged the narrow, winding lanes. Stores of equipment, vehicles, and fuel were hidden in woodlands and spread across fields. Massive preparations were under way for the long-awaited liberation of Western Europe.

The American soldiers' training was made as realistic as possible, with an emphasis on amphibious tactics because they and their Allied comrades would be landing in northern France from the English Channel, stubbornly opposed by seasoned German defenders. While many of the other Allied troops had little or no combat experience, the vast majority of the Americans had seen no action at all. Out of 15,000 men in the U.S. 29th Infantry "Blue and the Gray" Division, newly arrived and destined to land on Omaha Beach, only five had been under fire.

Late in 1943, the British War Cabinet approved the building of two 25-square-mile assault training centers for the U.S. troops in Devon—one on the scenic northern coast between Appledore and Woolacombe and the other between the ports of Brixham and Salcombe on the southern coast. The central stretch of the latter coastline, Slapton Sands in Start Bay, was earmarked for the U.S. 4th Infantry "Ivy" Division because it was strikingly similar to Utah Beach, the division's assigned invasion beach in Operation Overlord.

From the summer of 1943 onward, southwestern England became an American training area. The U.S. Navy took over several bases in the Royal Navy's Plymouth Command, and the Stars and Stripes was hoisted over six new landing craft maintenance and repair centers along the southwestern coast.

At public meetings early in

American landing craft sail about off the English coastline at Slapton Sands in preparation for a D-Day landing exercise. Note the barrage balloon floating above the vessels to ward off strafing German fighters and dive bombers. The devastating attack at Slapton Sands, however, came from the sea in the form of German E-boats.

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November 1943, officials of the six principal villages in the Slapton Sands area were informed that about 2,750 residents were to be displaced and 17,000 acres of farmland placed under U.S. Army control by December 20. That month, Royal Navy officers set up offices in the area and supervised the evacuation of families who for generations had fished in the Channel waters or farmed the surrounding countryside.

Full-scale practice landings for the D-Day invasion got under way in the early months of 1944. One of the biggest rehearsals was Exercise Tiger, planned at Slapton Sands in April for 23,000 men of Maj. Gen. Raymond O. "Tubby" Barton's 4th Infantry Division and support elements. The operation commenced on Wednesday, April 26, when riflemen and tank, combat engineer, and medical troops were taken out into the choppy English Channel. The first assault wave stormed the broad Slapton beach, facing simulated machine-gun fire and even fake dead bodies, at dawn on the 27th. The landing was marked by "wild confusion," with troops arriving in the wrong order, traffic jams, and a lack of senior naval officers to take charge.

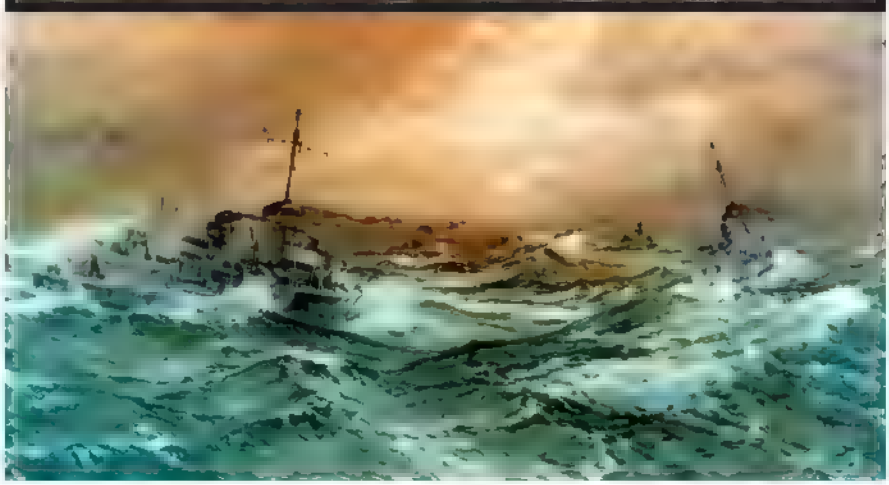
The troops forming the second and third assault waves were loaded aboard eight hulking, flat-bottomed LSTs (landing ship, tank) with massive bow doors, each of which could carry 300 men and 60 vehicles straight onto a beach. Men, vehicles, and supplies were crammed into the 322-foot-long vessels, nicknamed "Large Slow Targets."

The opening phase of Exercise Tiger was watched briefly on April 27 by General Dwight D. Eisenhower, supreme commander of the Allied armies, General Bernard L. Montgomery, Allied ground forces leader, and Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay, the overall D-Day naval commander, but things started to go awry from the beginning. On that morning, Rear Admiral Don P. Moon, the U.S. naval commander of the exercise, postponed H-hour for 60 minutes, and some units of the 4th Infantry Division did not receive the message.

Royal Navy destroyers had been assigned to protect the LSTs, but owing to an error in the paperwork the landing craft and their escorts were on different radio frequencies and could not communicate. Further, one of the ships, HMS *Scimitar,* had to return to base at Plymouth after being holed in a ramming on April 26, and her captain was unable to inform the Americans. He asked for permission to rejoin the convoy but was refused. This left the rear of the "invasion flotilla" unprotected.

Commander Bernard Skahill was the U.S. officer responsible for the LSTs. Directing the flotilla from the bridge of *LST-515,* he had no way of knowing on April 27 that he was to be protected only by the destroyer HMS *Saladin* and the underarmed corvette HMS *Azalea.* The Saladin was 30 miles away and did not catch up with the LSTs until after 3 AM.

ABOVE: *LST 289* (Landing Ship, Tank) lies in the harbor at Portsmouth, England, following the devastating attack by German E-boats during Exercise Tiger on the night of April 27, 1944. BELOW: In this painting by a German war artist, swift, maneuverable E-boats roll in heavy seas in the English Channel. On the night of April 27, 1944, E-boats disrupted Exercise Tiger with torpedoes and gunfire, inflicting heavy casualties.

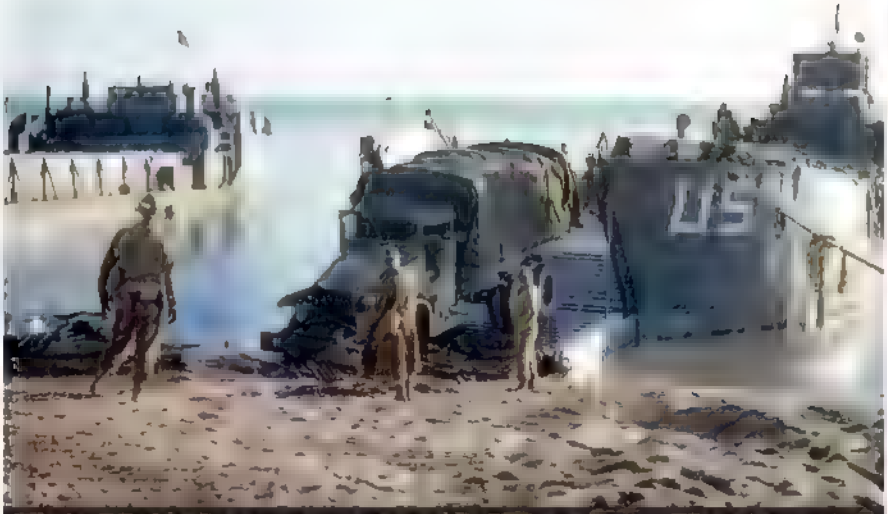


During the night of April 27-28, the heavily laden LSTs—inadequately protected and vulnerable—and two pontoons of Admiral Moon's 337-vessel Force U churned slowly through Lyme Bay, off the Dorset resort of Lyme Regis, heading for Slapton Sands, about 40 miles westward. Then, shortly before 2 AM while the flotilla was 15 miles off the Dorset peninsula of Portland Bill, all hell suddenly broke loose when nine diesel-powered German E-boats from Cherbourg appeared on the scene. They were like foxes loose in a chicken coop.

Painted black and almost invisible, the raiders screamed across the dark water among the landing ships and fired streams of green tracer shells that spread panic and chaos. One of the enemy boats fired two torpedoes, and a sheet of flame leaped from *LST-507.* Fatally damaged, she started sinking as some of the 447 soldiers and sailors on board began throwing themselves into the sea. Men yelled, "We're gonna die!"

Lieutenant James Murdoch, who survived the death of *LST-507,* reported later, "All of the Army vehicles naturally were loaded with gasoline, and it was the gasoline which caught fire first. As the gasoline spread on the deck and poured into the fuel oil which was seeping out of the side of the ship, it caused fire on the water around the ship."

For Lieutenant Eugene Eckstam, "the greatest horror" was the screams of soldiers trapped in the "high, roaring furnace fire" where trucks were exploding on the LST's tank deck. Commander Skahill saw the *LST-507* inferno, but



During a quiet D-Day landing rehearsal at Slapton Sands, a truck rolls off the ramp of a landing craft. The Slapton Sands area was chosen for rehearsals of the D-Day operation because the coastline resembled the Utah Beach area in Normandy.

he had no idea what had happened because of an earlier order for radio silence. Worse was yet to come.

Fifteen minutes later, two E-boats closed in on another landing ship. Two torpedoes slammed into the side of *LST-531*, and she started listing to starboard, rocked by explosions. Her demise was even swifter than that of *LST-507*. Emanuel Rubin, a crewman aboard *LST-496*, saw "a gigantic orange-ball explosion, like something from the movies, a flame like it had come from hell, with little black specks round the edges which we knew were jeeps or boat stanchions, or men." Injured men screamed for help as they were thrown into pools of burning oil on the Channel surface.

Floundering helplessly in the black water and trying to calm panic-stricken men, Navy Corpsman Arthur Victor watched ammunition explode from *LST-531*'s bow "like a Fourth of July celebration" and "bodies flung in all directions like rag dolls."

By now, confusion swept through the ambushed LST flotilla. Exercise Tiger, a dress rehearsal for the Normandy invasion only a month and a half away, had swiftly turned into a nightmare of blind firing, panic, and sudden death. One LST crewman said that the E-boats had the landing ships "trapped and hemmed in like a bunch of wolves circling a wounded dog."

Confused soldiers shot at their own boats, believing they were firing at the Germans. Other GIs, unaware that they had been issued with live ammunition, thought that the explosions and flames around them were part of the exercise. Men drowned, and Sherman tanks and trucks sank.

Around 2:30 AM, an E-boat loosed a torpedo at *LST-289*. Another explosion lit up the Channel waters, and the LST's stern was severely damaged, but her crew managed to keep her afloat. A Royal Navy task group led by the destroyer HMS *Onslow* raced to the area, but the E-boats eluded it.

By 3:30 AM, Commander Skahill decided not to risk losing more of his men, so he sent the remaining six LSTs back to port. Before doing so, one of his ship's landing craft moved through the wreckage and picked up 45 survivors. When dawn broke, hundreds of soldiers were found floating upside down in the cold Channel waters. Improperly instructed, they had incorrectly placed their life vests around their waists instead of under their arms. The weight of their packs and equipment had forced their heads down into the water, and they drowned. Burns, shock, and hypothermia also took a toll. For these untried young American soldiers and seamen, their baptism of fire had come unexpectedly and six weeks early.

The initial death toll in the most costly wartime training disaster in U.S. military history was 441 Army and 198 Navy personnel, but another 110 soldiers were subsequently determined as killed or missing. The heaviest casualties occurred among quartermaster and valuable engineer companies. One of the largest losses of American lives in a single incident since the Pearl Harbor attack, it came to be known as the "Night of the Bloody Tiger."

When reports of the disaster reached General Eisenhower's headquarters near Portsmouth, Hampshire, it was quickly decided that it

Continued on page 76

ON a serene Sunday morning the residents of Oahu enjoyed the dawning of another gorgeous day in paradise. Unknown to them, three converging formations of military aircraft navigated toward their lush island, homing in on the soothing Hawaiian music playing on Honolulu radio stations KGMB and KGU.

The night before, Lt. Col. Clay Hoppaugh, signal officer for the Hawaiian Air Force, had contacted Welby Edwards, manager of KGMB, and asked that the station remain on all night so a flight of Army Air Corps Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress bombers flying from California could home in on the station's signal. Actually, it was a less than well-kept secret that whenever the station played music all night, aircraft flew in from the mainland the next morning.

Being nondirectional, however, that same music also drifted into the radio receivers in the operations rooms of Vice Admiral Chuichi Nagumo's six Japanese aircraft carriers, *Akagi, Kaga, Soryu, Hiryu, Shokaku,* and *Zuikaku,* located roughly 300 miles north of Oahu. Nagumo's task force monitored the station throughout the night for any hint of a military alert on Oahu, and at approximately 7 AM on Sunday Lt. Cmdr. Mitsuo Fuchida, leading his formation toward Oahu, also tuned in KGMB to guide his 183 aircraft to their destination. While Fuchida homed in on KGMB's signal, 18 U.S. Navy Douglas SBD Dauntless dive bombers took off from the aircraft carrier *Enterprise* 200 miles west of Oahu and tuned in radio station KGU to get some homing practice of their own. Shortly after 8 AM, the three converging formations, each tracking inbound on the same innocent radio beams, collided in brutal and deadly aerial combat that would plunge the United States into World War II. The date was December 7, 1941.

The story of the Japanese surprise attack on Perl Harbor is, of course, much broader and more nuanced than just the events surrounding the devastating strike against the United States Navy's Pacific Fleet. In the over 70 years since the attack, there has been no shortage of books and articles detailing events on the "Day of Infamy," yet most accounts focus almost exclusively on what happened to the U.S. Navy at Pearl Harbor.

DESPITE THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE IN FAVOR OF THE JAPANESE, AMERICAN AIRMEN ROSE TO DEFEND PEARL HARBOR.

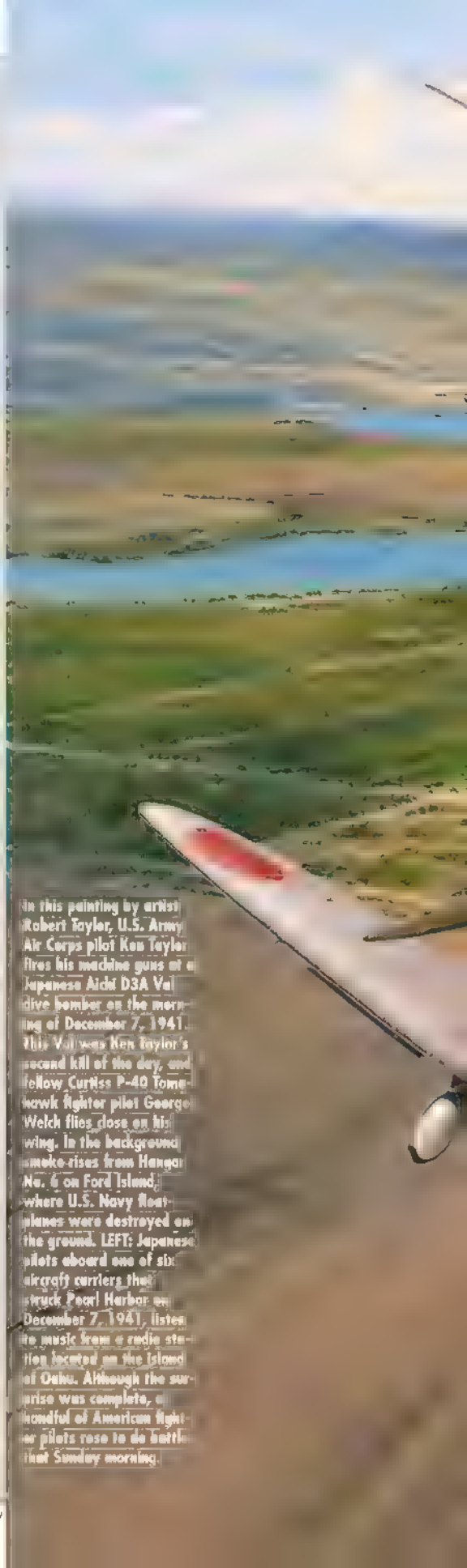
Incongruously, scant attention has been paid to the drama of swirling air-to-air combat over Oahu on December 7. For the most part, the aerial battles and dogfights are relegated to footnotes or to a few obscure paragraphs scattered among dozens of sources. Yet the clashes in the air are as compelling, electrifying, and powerful as any actions at Pearl Harbor. Although new sources, American and Japanese, have clarified and in some cases altered the facts about a few iconic episodes, the handful of airmen who fought, and in some cases died, that Sunday morning were truly American heroes who willingly flew to the sound of battle and carried the fight to a determined enemy. Their fight adds a vital missing dimension to the long-established Pearl Harbor story.

National Archives

BY TOM YARBOROUGH

The aerial saga began at approximately 6:15 AM on December 7, as Commander Minoru Genda, principal planner of the Pearl Harbor attack, watched anxiously aboard the carrier *Akagi* as his close friend and Eta Jima Naval Academy classmate Mitsuo Fuchida led the first wave of aircraft into the gray dawn. Both men were seasoned carrier pilots and combat veterans from China. Genda had also served a tour in London in 1940 as assistant naval attaché. He had been extremely impressed by the British carrier-based torpedo plane attack that sank or damaged several ships of the Italian Navy's Mediterranean fleet at the harbor of Taranto, so he felt confident that Fuchida would accomplish a similar feat at Pearl Harbor.

Confidence also permeated the thoughts of the strike commander. As he flew south in his Nakajima B5N2 Kate bomber, a flamboyant Fuchida wore red underwear and a red shirt, reasoning that blood would not show if he were wounded and therefore would not demoralize the other fliers. So it was in that frame of mind as he approached Oahu's North Shore



In this painting by artist Robert Taylor, U.S. Army Air Corps pilot Ken Taylor fires his machine guns at a Japanese Aichi D3A Val dive bomber on the morning of December 7, 1941. This Val was Ken Taylor's second kill of the day, and fellow Curtiss P-40 Tomahawk fighter pilot George Welch flies close on his wing. In the background smoke rises from Hangar No. 6 on Ford Island, where U.S. Navy floatplanes were destroyed on the ground. LEFT: Japanese pilots aboard one of six aircraft carriers that struck Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, listen to music from a radio station located on the Island of Oahu. Although the surprise was complete, a handful of American fighter pilots rose to do battle that Sunday morning.

Painting by Robert Taylor The Military Gallery

INFAMY
in the air

that Fuchida observed a tranquil, peaceful panorama before him; his first wave had achieved complete surprise. He gave the attack order at 7:40 AM, unleashing 43 Mitsubishi A6M2 Zero fighters, 49 high-level Kate bombers, 51 Aichi D3A1 Val dive bombers, and 40 Kate torpedo bombers into battle. Then, at 7:53 he sent his infamous message confirming total strategic and tactical surprise: "Tora! Tora! Tora!"

The first-wave fighters wasted no time. Ironically, the opening aerial combat of the Pearl Harbor attack involved a civilian aircraft. One minute after Fuchida's "Tora!" message, several Zeros from the carrier *Akagi* stumbled across a Piper Cub flown by solo student Marcus F. Poston. Unable to resist the temptation, the Zeros opened fire with their two 20mm cannon and two 7.7mm machine guns, ripping the Cub's engine from its mount. The startled but lucky student pilot leaped unhurt from his plane for his first and only parachute jump. Zero pilots Takeshi Hirano and Shinaji Iwama shared the kill

Genda's brilliant and bold plan, executed to perfection by Fuchida's first wave, unfolded without a hitch. Between 7:55 and 8:10 a host of Val dive bombers escorted by Zeros laid waste to the two major military air bases on Oahu. Attacking from different quadrants, 25 Vals dropping 550-pound bombs turned Wheeler Field into a raging inferno. The Curtiss P-40 Tomahawk fighters on the tarmac of the 14th Pursuit Wing offered a particularly inviting target. By order of U.S. Army Lt. Gen. Walter C. Short, commander of the Hawaiian Department, all aircraft at Wheeler and Hickam Fields were parked wingtip to wingtip in precise rows, ostensibly to facilitate guarding against sabotage.

Rampaging Vals and strafing Zeros found easy pickings. They destroyed 58 fighters on the ground and damaged another 37. At Hickam only 19 of 58 bombers from the 18th Bombardment Wing survived the attack. Simultaneously, huge columns of black smoke boiled above Pearl Harbor where Type 91 Model 2 Japanese torpedoes had already smashed into the battleships *Oklahoma, West Virginia, Arizona,* and *California.*

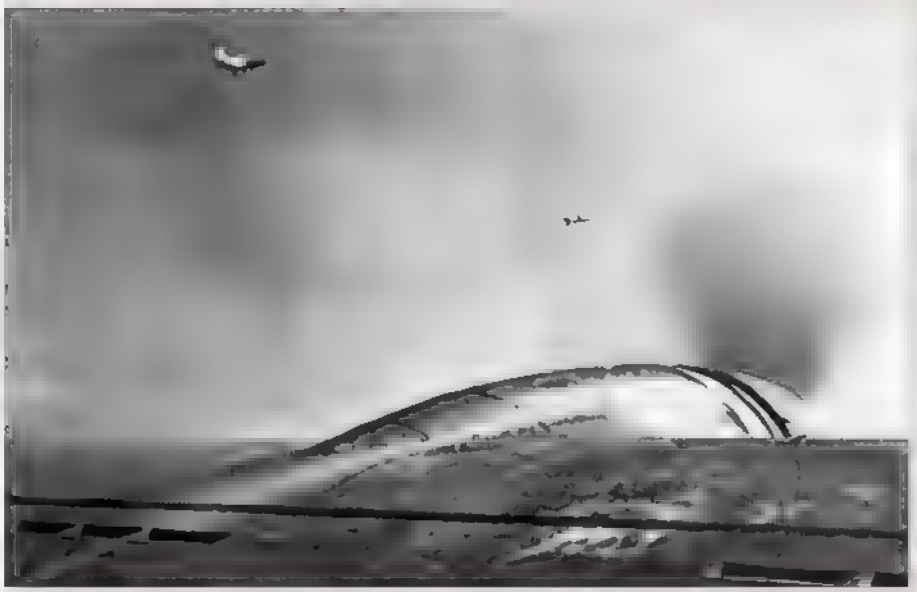
Into this maelstrom of devastation and confusion stumbled the 12 B-17s of the 38th and 88th Reconnaissance Squadrons, led by Major Truman H. Landon. Contrary to a widespread contemporaneous view, they did not make the 13-hour trip in formation; each of the four B-17Cs and eight B-17Es flew and navigated separately, their flights beginning at Hamilton Field, California, about 25 miles north of San Francisco.

Emphasizing the importance of the mission to the Philippines by way of Honolulu, no less a personage than Chief of the Army Air Forces General Henry "Hap" Arnold was there to see them off. Interrupting a quail hunting trip to address the crews, he warned them, "War is imminent. You may run into a war during your flight." Armed with that admonition but nothing else, the big bombers began taking off at 10:30 PM. The prevalent feeling was that a war would not erupt until after they reached the Philippines. Therefore, none of the ships carried armor or ammunition; they were stripped down and packed to the brim with every gallon of fuel they could carry for the long hop from California to Hawaii. The B-17 Flying Fortresses did in fact carry their potent arsenal of .50-caliber machine guns, but they were boxed, stowed away, and packed in Cosmoline.

As Major Landon's B-17E approached Oahu from the north at approximately 8 AM, he observed a group of planes flying toward him. His first thought was, "Here comes the Air Force out to greet us." Seconds later the unidentified aircraft dived on Landon, cannon and machine guns blazing. Over the intercom the crew heard someone say, "Damn it, those are Japs!"

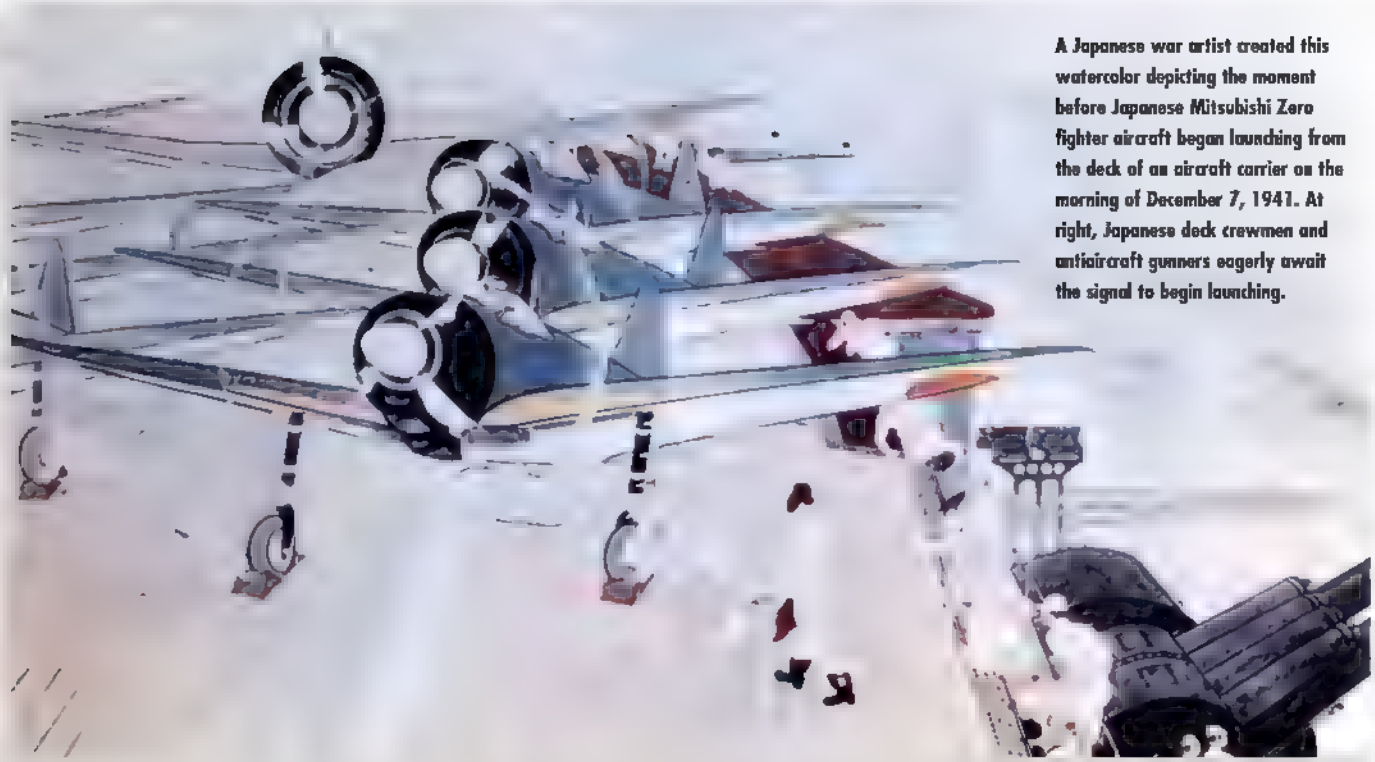
To evade the attackers, Landon skillfully flew into a nearby cloud bank, then took up a heading for land. As Landon maneuvered his bomber on the short final run to the Hickham runway, the tower operator advised, "You have three Japs on your tail!" In spite of the hail of fire coming his way, somehow Major Landon managed to get his bird down in one piece. Following right behind Landon, another B-17E appeared through the heavy smoke and touched down. Not believing his eyes, the pilot, Lieutenant Karl T. Barthelmess, thought it was the most realistic drill he had ever seen.

Captain Raymond T. Swenson and crew were not so lucky. After one aborted approach, the pilot positioned his B-17C for a second attempt at Hickam's runway. At that point a Zero piloted by Lt. Cmdr. Shigeru Itaya riddled the aircraft at point-blank range, sending several bullets into the radio compartment and



Both: National Archives

ABOVE: A flight of U.S. Boeing B-17 bombers from California was caught up in the air raid on Pearl Harbor. In this photo taken from one of the B-17s, a pair of Japanese Aichi D3A Val dive bombers, distinguished by their fixed landing gear, are seen heading for targets on Oahu. RIGHT: This Boeing B-17 bomber on a supposedly routine flight from California to Hawaii desperately seeks a place to land after arriving over Oahu in the midst of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and other installations in Hawaii.



A Japanese war artist created this watercolor depicting the moment before Japanese Mitsubishi Zero fighter aircraft began launching from the deck of an aircraft carrier on the morning of December 7, 1941. At right, Japanese deck crewmen and antiaircraft gunners eagerly await the signal to begin launching.

National Archives

igniting a bundle of magnesium flares. The Flying Fortress was engulfed in flames when it touched down, and halfway through the landing roll the incinerated fuselage broke in half just behind the wing root. The crew jumped from the burning wreck and ran across the field for cover. All made it except one. The squadron flight surgeon, Lieutenant William R. Schick, was gunned down by a strafing Zero. He died the following day at Tripler Army Hospital.

After repeated Japanese fighter attacks, 1st Lt. Robert H. Richards gave up trying to land in the shambles at Hickam and headed east. Dangerously low on fuel with three wounded crewmen aboard and heavy damage to the ailerons of his B-17C, Richards guided his aircraft in for a downwind landing on the short runway at Bellows Field, a fighter strip on Oahu's southeast coast. Richards flared out and touched down at approximately midfield on the short strip. Realizing he would not be able to stop, he retracted the wheels and slid off the runway over a ditch and into a sugarcane field bordering Bellows. Maintenance crews counted 73 bullet holes in the plane.

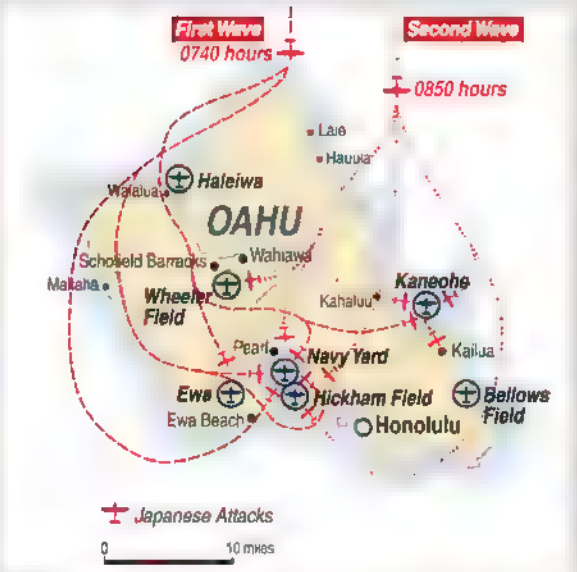
First Lieutenant Frank P. Bostrom also discovered that Hickam, under heavy dive bombing and strafing attacks, was a less than inviting choice for landing. After his B-17E was harassed by nine Zeros, he headed west for Barbers Point, only to be driven off by more Japanese fighters. Desperate to land anywhere and sincerely believing that necessity really was the mother of invention, Bostrom finally set his damaged B-17 down on a fairway at the North Shore's Kahuku Golf Course. In addition to one Flying Fortress on the golf course and one at Bellows Field, two other B-17s slipped into Haleiwa's small fighter strip. The remaining eight staggered into Hickam, although one Flying Fortress apparently landed at Wheeler before relocating to Hickam. All were on the ground by 8:20 AM. To a man, each crewmember vividly recalled General Arnold's prophetic warning: they had indeed run into a war.

While Major Landon and his B-17s were mixing it up with Japanese aircraft over Hickam Field, 18 U.S. Navy Douglas SBD Dauntless dive bombers in nine flights of two aircraft each approached Oahu's west coast. The aircraft from Scouting and Bombing Squadrons Six had launched from the carrier *Enterprise* at 6:18 that morning en route to Ewa and Ford Island. Their mission was to scout ahead of the *Enterprise* on a 90-degree sector search from 045 degrees to 135 degrees for 150 miles, then practice navigation by homing in on radio station KGU's signal. Between 8:15 and 8:30 AM, they flew directly into the gunsights of marauding Zeros from the carrier *Soryu*. An ominous radio transmission from one of the SBDs set the tone. Over their radios most of the squadron members of Scouting Six and Bombing Six heard the voice of Ensign Manuel Gonzales shout, "Do not attack me. This is Six Baker Three, an American plane!" Gonzales and his radioman/gunner, Leonard J. Kozelek, were never seen again.

Although the SBD Dauntless was no dogfighter, it did have some teeth. It sported two .50-caliber machine guns in its nose cowling and a .30-caliber machine gun manned by the radioman/gunner in the rear cockpit. Ensign John H.L. Vogt armed his guns and unhesitatingly flew his SBD-2 into a group of first-wave aircraft forming up for the return flight to their carrier. Marines on the ground at Ewa watched in amazement as Vogt tangled with a Zero in a twisting, turning fight from 4,000 feet down to just 25 feet above the ground. Marine Lt. Col. Claude Larkin, commander at Ewa, witnessed the battle. According to Larkin, during one of the abrupt turns the Dauntless and the Zero collided. Vogt and his radioman/gunner, Sidney Pierce, managed to bail out, but they were too low. Both perished when their parachutes failed to fully deploy. Subsequent investigations of Japanese combat records revealed that there was a near miss but no collision; only three first-wave Zeros were lost and none in the vicinity of Ewa. Vogt's SBD-2 apparently went down under the guns of a *Soryu* Zero piloted by Shinichi Suzuki.

At that point another *Enterprise* flight of SBDs was approaching Barbers Point from the south. Lieutenant Clarence E. Dickinson and his wingman, Ensign John R. McCarthy, were cruising at 4,000 feet when McCarthy spotted two Zeros. He slid under Dickinson so his gunner could get a better shot at the approaching fighters, but that move placed his aircraft in the direct line of fire. McCarthy's SBD-2 instantly

National Archives



Map © 2014 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN

ABOVE: A flight of Douglas SBD Dauntless dive bombers from the aircraft carrier USS *Enterprise* flies above the carrier and other ships of its task force during a training exercise. A flight of Dauntlesses was taken under friendly fire as it approached Oahu, sustaining numerous casualties on December 7, 1941. The unfortunate incident occurred because skittish gunners on the ground feared a renewal of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. LEFT: On the morning of December 7, 1941, nearly 400 Japanese combat aircraft attacked American military installations at Pearl Harbor and several other locations on the island of Oahu, taking the Americans by surprise and inflicting heavy losses. The attackers arrived in two waves of bombers, torpedo planes, and fighters.

began smoking and crashed, killing his radioman/gunner, Mitchell Cohn. McCarthy managed to bail out, suffering a broken leg when he landed.

Now without a wingman, Dickinson was attacked by four enemy planes. He managed to get in two short bursts from his guns when a Zero overshot, and his backseater, William C. Miller, damaged one of the Zeros while the others hammered his plane from the rear. Miller apparently died or was incapacitated in the deadly exchange. With his left fuel tank on fire and his controls shot away, Dickinson attempted a hard turn to the right away from his attackers, but the SBD-3 went into a spin. He "hit the silk" at approximately 1,000 feet. Fortunately, he landed unhurt on a dirt embankment just east of Ewa. From there the resourceful naval aviator, dragging his parachute, walked to the main road and hitched a ride with Mr. and Mrs. Otto Hein, who happened to be driving by in their blue sedan. They had no idea that a battle was raging above them. The middle-aged couple turned around and drove Lieutenant Dickinson to Pearl Harbor.

Two more SBDs went down during the first wave. Over Barbers Point, Zeros pounced on Ensign Walter M. Willis and his gunner, Fred J. Ducolon. No trace of either man has ever been found. The final victim was Ensign Edward T. Deacon, shot down by friendly ground fire from Army troops stationed at Fort Weaver near the entrance to Pearl Harbor. Deacon ditched in shallow water several hundred yards from the beach. He and his radioman/gunner were rescued.

The Japanese attack had caught the Hawaiian Air Force, affectionately known as the Pineapple Air Force, completely by surprise. General Short had received a war warning message on November 27 from Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall advising, "Hostile action possible at any moment..." and further directing Short "to undertake such reconnaissance and other measures as you deem necessary." At that point all Hawaiian Army units went on full alert and languished there for a week. By the morning of December 6, General Short elected to stand down and give his men the weekend off.

Marshall's war warning proved prophetic. When the attack materialized 10 days later and caught the chain of command napping, a handful of individual Army Air Force pilots got airborne on their own initiative and engaged the enemy, but there was no coordinated defense. The few serviceable aircraft were launched piecemeal as pilots arrived to fly them.

Just before 8 AM, when the first Japanese bombs exploded among the parked aircraft at Wheeler Field and shattered the Sunday morning calm, two second lieutenants, "brown bars" only a few months out of flight school, sprang into action. Kenneth M. Taylor from Hominy, Oklahoma, and George S. Welch from Wilmington, Delaware, were still a little groggy from a round of Saturday night partying. Sporting tuxedos and white dinner jackets, the lieutenants had begun the evening at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel before moving on to a dance at the Hickam Officers' Club. From there they adjourned to the Wheeler Officers' Club for a late-night poker game before turning in around 3 AM.

At the sound of the first bombs, Taylor staggered out of bed and hastily dressed in the nearest apparel, tux trousers and formal shirt. Immediately he ran into the street and met Welch, who shouted, "What the hell is going on? Those son-of-a-bitches are bombing the hell out of us!"

Both young lieutenants realized that a war had started, but they were not exactly sure with whom. Dumbfounded by the catastrophe unfolding before his eyes, Taylor eventually had the presence of mind to call Haleiwa, the auxiliary field on the North Shore where his squadron's P-40B fighters had been bedded down, and direct them to get the planes ready for

immediate launch. With that, both men jumped into Taylor's red Buick and raced to Haleiwa about 10 miles away. The field had been fortuitously overlooked in Genda's attack plan.

On arrival the Army pilots hurriedly strapped into their P-40s and took off. Right behind them, 2nd Lt. John Dains arrived in another car and took off in the next available P-40. Although many historians and newspapers credit Taylor and Welch with America's first aerial victory of World War II, there is a strong possibility that Dains may own that honor. Early in the second wave, radar operators at Ka'a'awa on the windward coast watched as Dains engaged in a vicious dogfight with a Val piloted by Satoru Kawasaki and shot his opponent down. Unfortunately, as Dains returned to Wheeler from his second sortie, this time flying a P-36 fighter, trigger-happy gunners at Schofield Barracks opened fire and killed him.

When Taylor and Welch took off from Haleiwa, for unknown reasons only the four wing-mounted .30-caliber machine guns in each plane were loaded. The plane's two .50-caliber machine guns were not. Although estimates vary widely, the two lieutenants probably got airborne around 8:55 with instructions to patrol over Barbers Point. Finding nothing there, Welch, nicknamed "Wheaties," spotted about a dozen aircraft circling over the Marine airfield at Ewa.

Using Taylor's nickname, Welch shouted, "Hey Grits, I see Jap bombers down there just like sitting ducks." With that, both pilots put their P-40s into screaming dives and closed on the circling Val dive bombers. The novice fighter pilots simply dropped into line behind the wagon wheel formation, picked individual targets, and began firing. Welch lined up a Val in his sights. With only three of his four guns firing, he sent a long burst into his opponent and watched as the smoking Val tumbled out of control and fell to earth.

In an interview shortly after the fight, Welch described the action over Ewa: "Their rear gunner was apparently shooting at the ground—because they didn't see us coming. I got him in a five-second burst—he burned up right away." Welch was credited with the victory, but years later further investigation indicates that in the chaotic combat Hiroyasu Kawabata's Val recovered on the deck and was able to limp back to the *Hiryu*.

Taylor brought down the first plane he engaged. He noted, "It was a short burst but the guy immediately exploded into flames and rolled over. All I could see were those two fixed landing gear sticking up. He crashed very close to Ewa."

After watching the first Val plummet toward the ground, Welch went vertical by executing a loop and lined up another D3A in his sights. Welch explained, "I left him and got the next plane in a circle which was about one hundred yards ahead of him. It took about three bursts of five seconds each to get him. He crashed on the beach."

While Welch's .30-caliber machine guns ripped Hajime Goto's Val apart, the rear seat gunner returned fire, forcing Welch to break off. At that point Japanese sources claim that Taylor opened fire on the same Val, wounding the gunner and scoring more hits on the enemy plane.

In the confusion and unaware of Welch's duel with Goto, Taylor's account of the action stated, "With my first burst I killed his rear gunner, and then began to pour it into the Jap. Black smoke began to stream out of him and he started to lose altitude fast. I didn't want to get too far out to sea, so I headed for Wheeler Field, and I didn't see this fellow crash."

Army officials saw it differently. In view of the fact that Welch's deadly fire had raked Goto's Val and that he observed the aircraft crash, they assigned credit for the victory to Welch.

The duo of Taylor and Welch latched onto other Vals and saw them smoke but never witnessed the crashes. Low on ammunition, Grits and Wheaties broke off the engagement and individually set course for Wheeler.

Over the years the exact time and details of the Taylor and Welch combat over Ewa have been repeatedly analyzed and in some cases

"WITH MY FIRST BURST I KILLED HIS REAR GUNNER, AND THEN BEGAN TO POUR IT INTO THE JAP. BLACK SMOKE BEGAN TO STREAM OUT OF HIM AND HE STARTED TO LOSE ALTITUDE FAST… I DIDN'T SEE THIS FELLOW CRASH."

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: This Japanese Aichi D3A Val dive bomber photographed en route to Pearl Harbor is distinguishable by its fixed landing gear and aiming device that protrudes from the cockpit. The aircraft also has its lethal bomb slung beneath the fuselage. RIGHT: American P-40 fighter pilots George Welch (left) and Ken Taylor were credited with shooting down several Japanese planes during the Pearl Harbor attack. Although they had been out late the night before, the two American pilots sped to their planes and took off to fight the Japanese as quickly as they could.

questioned. Clearly the proverbial "fog of war" and lax record keeping contribute to the confusion, but the two pilots inadvertently fed the fires of controversy themselves. In testimony on December 26, 1941, before the Roberts Commission investigating the Pearl Harbor attack, Taylor related somewhat confusing details about what happened on December 7.

Taylor testified that after getting airborne from Haleiwa, "Lieutenant Welch and myself started patrolling the Island. There wasn't any .50-caliber ammunition, so we landed at the field [Wheeler]."

Taylor never mentioned the battle over Ewa. Moreover, both pilots' descriptions of combat to the Roberts Commission focused on their second sortie, leaving the impression that all the action had occurred after the wild launch out of Wheeler. Any inconsistencies were officially put to rest when the citations awarding Taylor and Welch the Distinguished Service Cross included the Haleiwa to Ewa combat sequences.

After landing at Wheeler, Taylor and Welch quickly climbed back into their rearmed P-40s for a second mission. They got airborne just as a Japanese second-wave formation bored in on the field, and according to eyewitnesses Taylor began firing his guns while still on takeoff roll. Once in the air, Taylor immediately began pouring machine-gun fire head-on into a Val, only to be jumped from behind by a second Val piloted by Saburo Makino. One of Makino's bullets shattered Taylor's canopy and went through his left arm, hit the metal trim tab, and then sent a dozen pieces of shrapnel into his legs.

Taylor broke into a high G turn in an effort to lose his foe, and then Welch came to the rescue. To keep from overshooting Makino's Val, Welch resourcefully lowered his flaps and began pummeling his opponent with .50-caliber machine-gun fire. Mrs. Paul Young, standing in the door of her house in Wahiawa, watched as Welch blasted the Val. Makino's D3A pitched down, shearing off the top of the eucalyptus tree in her backyard before it crashed into a nearby pineapple field. This was Welch's third confirmed kill of the day; a few minutes later he downed a Zero off Barbers Point.

With his 6 o'clock clear, Taylor engaged a Val flown by Iwao Oka. In spite of a blistering volley from the rear-seat gunner and wounds to his arm and legs, Taylor attacked Oka's aircraft mercilessly, sending the Val crashing into the ground near the entrance to a Civilian Conservation Corps camp.

At Haleiwa Lieutenants Harry W. Brown and Robert J. Rogers of the 47th Pursuit Squadron each took off in obsolete P-36s, an earlier version of the P-40 fitted with a radial engine. They headed for Kaena Point, the westernmost tip of Oahu, where Rogers encountered a mixed flight of Japanese aircraft. When two enemy planes singled Rogers out, Brown, from Amarillo, Texas, dived into the fight, shooting down one of the attackers. Rogers poured a long stream of tracers into the other aircraft, which smoked and fell away, but he did not see it crash. Brown then joined up with Lieutenant Malcolm A. Moore's P-36 and engaged two departing Zeros. Neither enemy fighter was seen to crash, but neither made it back to its carrier.

On the opposite side of the island, the battle turned tragic for the P-40 pilots of the 44th Pursuit Squadron. A flight of nine Zeros led by Lieutenant Fusata Iida had just wreaked havoc on Kaneohe Naval Air Station before moving south to Bellows. Several of the Marine ground crews at Kaneohe extracted a measure of revenge when they poured multiple Browning automatic rifle clips into Iida's fuel tank. Realizing he could never make it back to his carrier, Iida elected to dive his Zero into the Kaneohe base armory. Instead, his plunging aircraft struck a glancing blow on a street and then skidded into an earthen embankment. Later, Iida's mangled remains were removed from the wrecked aircraft and placed into a garbage can—not out of disrespect but because that was the only thing available. Iida's body, along with the bodies of 16 Americans, was left outside the sickbay entrance.

Then, at 9 AM, as three young pilots sprinted for any undamaged parked aircraft on the Bellows tarmac, the remaining Zeros from Iida's group strafed the ramp, killing 2nd Lt. Hans Christenson as he climbed into his P-40B. Two other lieutenants from the 44th Pursuit Squadron, George A. Whiteman and Samuel W. Bishop, gunned their engines on a hair-raising takeoff scramble. Before Whiteman got 100 feet into the air, a Zero piloted by Tsuguo Matsuyama blasted the vulnerable fighter with a burst right into the cockpit; the P-40 crashed into the sand dunes at the end of the runway and exploded. Bishop's P-40 attained 800 feet of altitude before a Zero literally pounded it into the ocean. Bishop crashed about a half mile off shore but got out of the wreckage and was able to swim to the beach.

Back in the shambles at Wheeler, Lieutenant Lewis M. Sanders of the 46th Pursuit Squadron found four serviceable P-36s and a ragtag collection of pilots to fly them. Second Lieutenants Phillip M. Rasmussen, John M. Thacker, and

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: After landing under fire at Hickam Field on Ford Island, two Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress bombers lie amid the smoke and ruin of the aftermath of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. RIGHT: The wreckage of a Japanese Mitsubishi A6M2 Zero fighter plane lies next to a building at Fort Kamehameha on Oahu. The plane was hit by American fire and crashed while attempting to strafe installations on the ground.

Gordon M. Sterling each jumped into the cockpit of a P-36. As he strapped in, Sterling, from West Hartford, Connecticut, handed his wristwatch to the crew chief and said, "See that my mother gets this. I won't be coming back."

At approximately 8:50, Lieutenant Sanders got his flight airborne between the first and second waves and headed east toward the naval air station at Kaneohe. From his altitude of 11,000 feet, Sanders spotted a formation of enemy aircraft, six *Soryu* Zeros about to join up with the same *Hiryu* Zeros that had ravaged Bellows. With no hesitation, the Americans dived into the numerically superior force.

At 9:15 Sanders opened fire on the leader and observed his tracers tear into the Zero's fuselage. The plane nosed up then fell off to the right smoking. After executing a fast clearing turn, Sanders saw Gordon Sterling in a near vertical dive pouring deadly fire into a Zero. But a second Zero latched onto Sterling's tail and peppered him with 20mm cannon fire. Sanders executed a diving turn with plenty of angle-off and engaged that Zero at maximum range.

In a terrifying scene, the line of four aircraft—Zero, Sterling's burning P-36, Zero, Sanders—disappeared into an overcast. In his combat report Sanders stated, "The way they had been going, they couldn't have pulled out, so it was obvious that all three went into the sea." Ultimately, however, Japanese records showed that only Sterling went into Kaneohe Bay. The two Zeros, although badly damaged, made it back to the *Soryu*.

Arguably, the title of luckiest pilot of the day belonged to Lieutenant Phil Rasmussen, a native Bostonian. As he dived into the dogfight as part of Lew Sanders's flight, Rasmussen, flying in purple pajamas, charged his machine guns only to have them malfunction and begin firing on their own. At that precise moment a Zero passed directly into his runaway machine-gun fire and exploded. Only a minute or two later Rasmussen was jumped by two Zeros that laced his P-36 with a volley of devastating machine-gun and cannon fire. The enemy barrage tore off his tail wheel, severed his rudder cables, and shattered his canopy. Rasmussen only escaped by ducking into a convenient cloud.

A handful of other Pineapple Air Force pilots saw action on that Sunday morning before Commander Fuchida rounded up the second wave and departed around 10 AM. The 19 Army Air Force pursuit pilots who got airborne during the attack downed 11 Japanese aircraft, claimed five probables, and damaged at least two others. The Japanese confirmed losing 29 aircraft over Oahu and were forced to jettison an additional 19 aircraft from their carriers because of extensive battle damage. On December 11 the *Honolulu Star Bulletin* published an article attributed to General Short declaring that Army fliers downed 20 Japanese aircraft during the attack.

Without question the American pilots and airmen who squared off against the Japanese in aerial combat at Pearl Harbor faced overwhelming odds, danger, and mass confusion. In spite of the chaos and turmoil, the relatively small number of inexperienced young lieutenants gave better than they got, and ironically nobody told them not to dogfight with nimble Zeros or Vals. Instead, they tackled their opponents in classic one-on-one air battles.

Many historians accept as a matter of faith that early in the war the Mitsubishi Zero maintained a high victory ratio against mediocre American fighters like the P-40 Warhawk. The statistics in general and Pearl Harbor in particular suggest a different conclusion. Although George Whiteman and Sam Bishop both fell prey to the vaunted Zero, they were on takeoff leg and in no position to bring their guns to bear. Lieutenant Gordon Sterling was the only pursuit pilot actually brought down in air-to-air combat with a Zero, whereas the American pilots flying supposedly inferior equipment downed at least four Zeros and two probables, thereby punching the first holes in the Zero's aura of invincibility.

Unfortunately, most Americans have no knowledge of these meager yet significant aerial victories and remember Pearl Harbor only as an unmitigated naval disaster. Perhaps a comment by Admiral Husband E. Kimmel, commander of the Pacific Fleet on December 7, best captures that gloomy sentiment. Watching the attack from his office window, Admiral Kimmel flinched when a spent bullet crashed through the glass, striking him on the chest and leaving a dark smudge on his white uniform. Picking up the bullet, he muttered, "It would have been merciful had it killed me."

National Archives

The Curtiss P-40 Tomahawk fighter was not as nimble as the Japanese Zero, but it was the frontline American fighter plane in the early days of World War II. Several American pilots climbed into their P-40s and other fighters and took off from airfields around Oahu on the morning of December 7, 1941, shooting down several Japanese planes during the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor.

There was no such negative sentiment among the surviving American fliers of that Sunday morning. A more appropriate mind-set for the fliers who battled above Pearl Harbor is captured in Winston Churchill's epic observation, "If you're going through hell, keep going!" They did. The Army Air Force crews and naval aviators engaged in aerial combat over Oahu, while unable to change the course of the battle, wrote the first American chapters in the World War II handbook on war in the air. They set the bar high and defined the aggressive spirit of American warriors who kept fighting in the face of overwhelming odds.

Author Tom Yarborough has researched and written extensively on the aerial action at Pearl Harbor. He resides in Springfield, Virginia.

Bundesarchiv Plak 003-011-013 Photo: Ludwig Hohlwein

A BDM Girl COMES TO AMERICA

A YOUNG GERMAN GIRL ENROLLED IN A NAZI YOUTH ORGANIZATION, SURVIVED THE WAR, AND MADE HER WAY TO THE UNITED STATES.

BY DON A. GREGORY

FRIEDA'S LAST DOLL was bought for her by her father, August Streit, in 1938. At age 10 she was really too old for dolls, her father thought, but he would buy her this last one.

The two of them traveled to Nuremberg to a large toy store where the beautiful doll in the window immediately caught Frieda's eye. Even though she eventually looked at almost every doll in the store, she still came back to that one and finally asked her father to buy it for her. It was 35 marks, a sizable amount of money in 1938, but he bought it for her anyway. It had been a good year so far for Frieda. She had even seen one of the great marvels of the time—the Graf Zeppelin—in flight. Germany was indeed a wonderful place to be, she thought, and she was lucky to have two parents who loved her very much. The world was just about perfect for a 10-year-old girl.

Then the war came, and everything became hard to get. In 1938-1939, the people who had money in Frieda's town of Ebermannstadt bought soap, which sounds like an odd thing to do. There were plenty of people around who remembered World War I and knew well the things that would soon be in short supply.

Frieda was 11, and her older half sister was 17 when the war broke out. Both of them knew that something big was happening but did not quite understand what all the excitement was about. Hitler had been the German chancellor for six years and was the only leader that Frieda could remember, not that she paid much attention to such things anyway. The war, if it came, would surely be somewhere far away, she thought, and besides, she had work to do.

It was hard helping her mother cook for the family, especially with rations of only half a pound of sugar a month, and since they did not have any babies in the family all they could get was blue milk, so watered down it looked perfectly blue. Beef and pork were rare commodities, but they had their rabbits that multiplied—like rabbits. Her father could prepare rabbit that could compete with the best sauerbraten in Germany. Later in the war they would also slaughter a few of her father's pigeons to supplement the slim meat ration. Her mother would add whatever meat they had to it and make something good. None of them ever went hungry but they also never knew for certain what had gone into the meals. They were just glad that they had those rabbits and pigeons.

Frieda was born January 16, 1928, to August and Anna (Kirchberger) Streit. Her mother was originally from Nuremberg; her father was from Saxony, and they had cousins in Munich. At one time there was some concern that her mother might have had some Jewish ancestry, but this was ruled out through an investigation done by the government. They were very careful in those sorts of things. Freida's mother had four brothers who would all eventually leave Germany and move to New York, the first in 1922, and they were all there by the time the war started. Her mother had one child named Annemarie from a previous marriage.

August never adopted Annemarie but nevertheless treated her as his own daughter, and she was always an older sister to Frieda. Annemarie was 11 when the National Socialists and Hitler came to power and had enrolled in the BDM (Bund Deutscher Mädel) soon after its creation in 1930. Its proper title was The League of German Girls of the Hitler Youth. Early in its history, the BDM stressed education for its girls and encouraged them to finish school and learn a skill. This was relatively rare for girls at the time, but many of the women who became regional and national BDM leaders were successful women who held university degrees, and the younger girls looked up to them as role models.

Hitler greets adoring members of the Bund Deutscher Mädel (BDM), the Nazi Party-sponsored youth organization for young German women. OPPOSITE: A young female with Aryan features is the centerpiece of this 1934 poster advertising the League of German Girls, an enterprise of the Hitler Youth. Adolescent women from across Germany joined the Nazi youth organization and were indoctrinated with party ideals.

Library of Congress

The requirement that most girls dreaded was the one year of service to the Reich. This could be accomplished in many ways. In fact, Frieda remembered one girl who was able to put in her year of service right at home because her family had a few cows. She was allowed to use her work helping with the milking and feeding as service, which no doubt it was, but it was as much a service to her family as to the Reich. This didn't seem quite fair to Frieda, who would soon have to leave home and give a year to the government herself. BDM girls were also expected to help with charitable work, such as collecting money for the WHW (Winterhilfswerk), which helped poor families by distributing coal and warm clothing to them during the winter months

The Nazi Party was founded in 1920, and the organization of youth groups was an important part of its mission, even in the early years. In fact, the Hitler Youth was the second oldest paramilitary organization in Nazi Germany. Only the SA (Sturmabteilung) was older. The first Nazi youth group was the Greater German Youth Movement, or Grossdeutsche Jugendbewegung, founded in 1923. It officially became the Hitler Youth in 1926, with Baldur von Schirach as its leader

The young women of the Reich became loosely organized as the Hitler Youth Sister Community, or Hitlerjugend Schwesternschaften, which eventually became the BDM in 1930. The organization rose to 25,000 members even before Hitler became chancellor in January 1933.

The adult National Socialist women of the Reich had their own organization called the NSF (Nationalsozialistische Frauenschaft), and its leader, Gertrud Scholz-Klink, initially wanted control of the young girls' organization as well, but Hitler decreed that all youth would be under Schirach. The leader of the BDM was a Berlin psychiatrist, Dr. Jutta Rudiger. Her official title was Reichsreferentin. She reported directly to Schirach, who generally left her to manage the BDM as she saw fit.

Membership in any Hitler Youth organization was voluntary until 1936, although most who qualified became members as early as they could, even before the Hitler decree that made it mandatory. There were more than seven million members of the BDM by the end of 1936. The decree, in any case, was not enforced until the beginning of the war, but it did make the Hitler Youth eligible for government funding, which the organization used to expand its programs. Frieda could sense that things were changing for girls her age, and it was an exciting time to be alive.

Annemarie joined the German government workforce, the RAD (Reichsarbeitsdienst), when she was 21 years old and first worked in a plant nursery, then in a butcher shop. Normally, young women joined either the RAD or the Frauenwerk after they turned 18, but they could also remain members of the BDM as long as they were not married and had no children. The Frauenwerk was not a rigidly organized Nazi institution like the NSF, and party membership was not required to join.

Annemarie's last job had definite advantages for the family because the butcher saved any excess meat scraps for her. Unfortunately, this job did not last long, and she was soon selling tickets for a streetcar company. The BDM magazine, *Das Deutsche Madel* (*The German Girl*), often featured ads for stenographers and nurses and had articles about girls working as ticket agents on trains or as nurses. The stories were designed to motivate young girls to do their part in the war effort, and the publicity worked well for the party. Girls Frieda's age and older volunteered by the thousands.

Frieda's mother joined the Frauenwerk soon after the war began because by then it was officially mandatory, and it also assured that the family would continue to receive its ration stamps for things ranging from food to shoes. Without the stamps, these things were only available on the black market, and people were told that if they were caught buying things this way, they could be shot. Frieda did not know if this was really true; she knew people who would occasionally buy things on the black market, but she never knew anyone to be shot for it. Sometimes it was the only way to get things that were really needed, like extra sugar and cooking oil for a Christmas cake. Even during the war, some things just could not be done without, especially at Christmas.

In school, the girls studied the usual reading, writing, and arithmetic, but there were also classes in religion, local and area history, singing, and handiwork which included knitting, sewing, and crocheting. They had about seven years of traditional schooling, then Sunday School after that. The boys had some of the same basic classes but also had additional instruction in recognizing enemy aircraft, marching, and weapons. Later in the war, the boys' main task was ditch digging. They dug antitank ditches everywhere, and some of the ditches are still visible today

The BDM's goal was to prepare young girls for their future roles in the community, and as an incentive to participate the organization offered many things that appealed to teens such as weekend outings and reduced prices at movie theaters. The girls also attended camps in the country that could last several weeks and participated in sporting events, just like the boys. BDM groups usually met twice a week; one of the meetings was devoted to sports, the other to Heimatabend (home evenings) with the girls learning crafts that would be useful to them as homemakers.

During the war, Frieda and the other girls her age in Ebermannstadt wrote letters to soldiers and packed boxes of baked goods and other things for them. The war, however, caused a gradual change in the BDM. Women and young girls began to be seen more as keepers of the home fires while the men were fighting, and they were also called on to fill jobs that were once exclusively reserved for men, such as air raid wardens and military signals specialists. This was in addition to their traditional wartime roles as nurses and hospital support personnel.

In 1941, Frieda was confirmed at age 13 in the Catholic faith at the Dreieinigkeitskirche (Holy Trinity Church) in Streitberg. Her family was Protestant, but it was not uncommon for her to go with her friends to Lutheran or Catholic services in Streitberg, as there was no Lutheran church in Ebermannstadt. A year after her confirmation, she joined the BDM. Her older sister who was 20, had completed her year of service to the Reich by then.

The opportunity to learn a trade actually appealed to many of the young women of Germany, who had never had this chance before Hitler came to power. It was a way for the girls of the Reich to prove they were just as valuable as the boys and that they could make their own contribution to a greater Germany. This was the message from the Reich Propaganda Minister, Joseph Goebbels, but to most of the youth of Germany it just seemed to be the right thing to do. In practice, especially after the war came, the BDM girls' service to the Reich could be different from what they were told, and many girls were used as common maids for higher ranking local members of the party.

Even before the outbreak of war, the BDM began including programs that were oriented more toward the traditional roles of women. The Glaube und Schonheit (Belief and Beauty) Society was founded in 1939 as part of the BDM and was dedicated to preparing young girls for domestic and child care futures.

As part of Frieda's year of service, which began that year, she worked for a Nazi official in town named Herr Hormes. She was basically a servant to the family, responsible for cleaning the house and doing some cooking. She spent days at the house but went home to her own house to eat and sleep. That way, her family could continue drawing her ration stamps for

food. There were five children, four boys and a girl, in the Nazi's family, all under eight years of age.

Frieda's service continued until she was severely disciplined one day for letting the fire in the cookstove go out. Her father did not appreciate his daughter being treated like a common maid and told her she did not have to go back to work there—and she did not. Instead, she went to work in the local municipal office, where ration stamps were given out. Unfortunately, a family with some political pull wanted their daughter to have that job, so Frieda finished her service in a bakery, which was hard work but with obvious benefits

In 1942, Frieda's mother became ill with a major hernia, and no doctor in the area could treat her. A trip to Nuremberg was required to see a specialist. This was a serious condition at the time, and doctors who could perform the required operation were difficult to find. The Nuremberg specialist called in several doctors to observe the delicate operation, which was a success, but it was a frightening time for 14-year-old Frieda. It was several weeks before her mother was able to do her normal housework, and that put a strain on everyone who depended on her.

In late 1944, Frieda worked as a seamstress in her hometown, and this continued until mid-March 1945, when the Americans bombed the place. She was taking a break at the time and had gone outside for some fresh air. She saw the airplanes overhead but did not think much of it until someone told her they were American planes and that she should get inside. She went inside and down into the cellar just as the bombing began.

The bombs wrecked the sewing plant. One unexploded bomb lodged in the wall of an adjoining building and remained there for years after the war. The only real casualties of the bombing that day were several horses. There were other bombing raids in the immediate area, and there was no public shelter nearby. Frieda's house, however, like most of that time, had a large cellar used for protection. The biggest danger from the sky came from the machine guns of German fighter planes over the town. Most houses had bullet holes in their roofs by the end of the war.

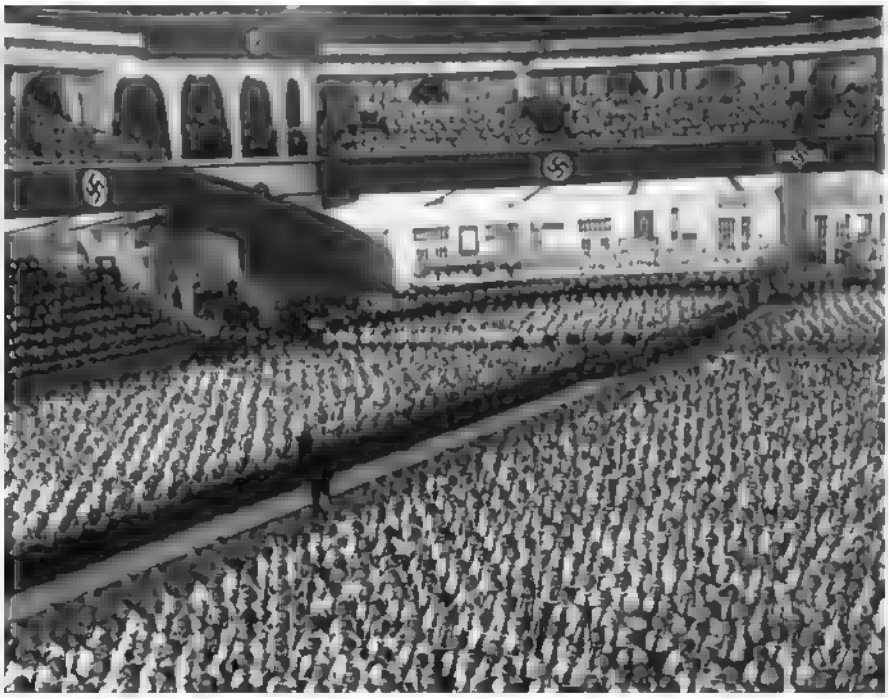
Annemarie's former husband was a prisoner of war in Russia, and although they were divorced she still talked about him. She also told Frieda stories about her biological father, who had been a machine gunner in World War I and was bayoneted twice in the back during a retreat from France. He recovered in a French hospital and worked on a farm until the war was over. He spoke French well and was rumored to have enjoyed the company of the French ladies.

Annemarie was later married to Fritz Merklein for a short time, and they had a son named Dieter who died of diphtheria at less than a year old on the day American soldiers occupied their town. They tried to get doctors in the area to see the child, but they all had been drafted into the military. The state-appointed doctor for their town told the family that all the child needed was fresh air out in the country. They knew better. The boy just kept getting weaker and would not eat.

One day, Annemarie happened to see from her upstairs window one of the local doctors walking by. She ran down and caught up with him and got him to come and look at the boy. He told her to take the child to Nuremberg immediately, which she did. The boy seemed to get a little better after the treatment and managed to eat a little, but one night he cried out, stood up in his bed, grabbed onto the railings, and shook them as hard as he could. They all knew he was dying, but he was fighting death as hard as his weak little body could. He died the next day.

Everyone in the town had been warned about the approaching Americans. German soldiers continued to march through the town, but they were not staying. They were on their way east

Bundesarchiv Bild 183-C04958. Photo: Müller



ABOVE: At the Berlin Sports Palace, Nazi Youth Leader Baldur von Schirach addresses a gathering of 12,000 members of the city's Hitler Youth and BDM. After the war, Schirach was prosecuted at Nuremberg and went to prison for war crimes. BELOW: Uniformed girls of the BDM enthusiastically give the Nazi salute during a rally in Berlin in September 1933 that included 30,000 children.

Bundesarchiv Bild 102-02893. Photo: Georg Pahl

to fight the Russians. The townspeople had been told for months that the invading Americans would rape and plunder, but when they finally did arrive it was a different story. The Americans came on April 14, 1945, and found no resistance in the town, so there was no real fighting. All of the able-bodied men had already been drafted.

Because Frieda's family had a large house, it was commandeered by the soldiers as their command post. The family had to get out, but they were allowed back to collect personal things and supplies. The Americans were, for the most part, a well-behaved group, and Frieda, being a pretty 17-year-old girl, was never without a dance partner. There were official rules against fraternization, but they were not strictly enforced.

A few American soldiers were ordered to remain behind to keep control of the town after the majority of them moved on, and they stayed in the Streit house as well. Frieda really did not remember the day the war ended. It ended for her and her family when the Americans came. She did remember the endless stream of refugees coming from the East, trying to escape the advancing Red Army. Among them were relatives of her future husband, from Annaberg in the Ore Mountains.

Near the end of the war, the boys in the Hitler Youth were called to an active role in the final defense of Germany. The BDM rarely took part in the actual fighting but did help with digging antitank ditches to defend towns against the invading enemy. That was mostly far to the east and west of Frieda's hometown. It was suggested that the BDM be instructed in the use of weapons for self-defense, and many girls were anxious to learn.

Some girls even joined Hitler Youth battalions, mostly fighting the Russians, because they had been told of the atrocities committed against German women in the East. The Hitler Youth (including the Bund Deutscher Madel), the largest youth organization ever known, was declared illegal by the Allies and disbanded soon after the war. Schirach received a 20-year sentence at the Nuremberg war crimes trials and served the entire term.

Frieda did not know about the concentration camps until after the war or at least near the end. She did hear stories of a woman whose husband (a German) was put in one, probably Dachau, and that the woman herself was later put there too, but they both survived the war. After the war, their downstairs neighbor was removed from his job because he had been a party member.

Frieda's father had been a train engineer during the war and was too old to be drafted, but he had to join the party. He did not want to, but his supervisor told him, "Streit, if you want to see your family eat, you'd better join," so he did. He was also an amateur photographer and radio repairman, so it was easy for him to find work with the Americans after the war. He was never treated badly, even though he had been a member of the party, and he was not harassed about it after the war.

Frieda's father had his own workshop in the house and did not tolerate the American boarders messing about in it. He was recognized as a skilled technician, and there were few of them left in Germany by that time.

Frieda was amazed at the merchandise that suddenly appeared in stores immediately after the war. The store owners had hidden everything until the end because they knew that it would have been paid for with money that would be worthless soon or confiscated for the war effort. If this hoarding had been reported to the Gestapo, it is likely that arrests would have been made.

The Americans were doing most of the buying in Ebermannstadt and all over Germany; they were the only ones with money at the time, and the Germans were all too happy to take American dollars. They knew they could be exchanged later when new money was printed or used to buy things from the Americans. It was a while before essentials like food and clothing were available, but a new washing machine was certainly available, although it was difficult to determine how much American money it should cost. These details were worked out quickly, and businesses began to function again.

On Sunday, June 20, 1948, when the new Deutschmark was introduced, everyone got 40 marks, but within a few weeks there were again millionaires in Germany. Most of them were the same millionaires that had existed long before the end of the war.

The janitor of the local Catholic Church in Ebermannstadt had a brother who everyone knew was in the SS during the war. The local people thought he had something to do with the Dachau concentration camp because it was not too far away, about four hours by train. It was suspected that he was a guard there. After the war, he came back to town to live, and he was questioned by the Americans to determine if he had committed any war crimes, but they let him go. The SS was labeled a criminal organization at the end of the war, and many of its members were arrested and put into the recently liberated concentration camps themselves.

There was one occasion when a group of Jews came to Ebermannstadt and wanted to know where this man lived. Apparently they knew him from Dachau and wanted to see him arrested, but it never happened. Frieda kept up with the trials in Nuremberg through the newspaper and kept a scrapbook of all the stories. It was the major news across Germany, and it was happening near her hometown.

After the war, Frieda worked for the Americans in Ebermannstadt, cleaning and keeping their barracks in order and later working for them in Nuremberg. She worked for an officer from Oklahoma who treated her well and paid her in food and coffee. This also gave Frieda a chance to learn about America; the soldiers talked about home all the time, and it sounded like a pretty good place to live. At the time, Germany was no place for a young woman trying to get a start in life. After a while it seemed like she already knew something about the places she wanted to see someday.

Oklahoma sounded very different from Germany, with so much open space and no mountains, but she also learned that there were plenty of mountains in other parts of the United States. It seemed that whatever kind of place someone liked could be found in that big country. Frieda thought that she would like to visit this place that everyone seemed to love and find out for herself what they were all talking about. The problem was that she had no money.

It was not too difficult to get a visa to America, especially if one had relatives there, but travel was expensive. The Allies printed new money, but it was just as hard to get as the old had been years ago. There were jobs that paid well, but they were mostly for men able to help with reconstruction, and food was scarce for a while at any price. Money earned in Frieda's family went toward buying the essentials, not toward travel to America.

In 1953, Frieda borrowed money from Annemarie's second husband to travel to America. She did not like this man much, but he did have money. This was money it would take her a long time to pay back. Annemarie and her husband had been in the United States a year already, in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, and Frieda also had uncles in the United States. Everyone threw Frieda a good-bye party before she left, and they took lots of pictures. Her parents remained in the same house in Ebermannstadt as long as they were able to care for themselves. The house has long since been torn down, and today it is a parking lot for the local post office.

Annmarie and her husband left Oak Ridge and moved to Florida shortly after Frieda arrived. The couple divorced soon after that.

Frieda's first job in America was as a housekeeper for a man in Oak Ridge. It was a good

job, but it did not pay much, and she saved everything she could to make payments on her debt. One day while she was out, a man named Herrmann called on the phone for her. She was given the message that a man with a German accent had called. She did not think too much of it until he called back again and she was able to talk to him. His name was Ernst Gerhard Herrmann, but he went by Gerhard. They talked several times, and she became friends with him.

Gerhard was well established in America and had become a machinist, but then she heard that he had told someone that he thought she was too young for him. Well, Frieda thought, if he thinks I am too young for him, then maybe he is too old for me. Eventually Gerhard persuaded her to take a trip with him to the Great Smoky Mountains. He did not know that she would invite the family she worked for—it was the right thing to do, after all.

The group visited the park, but their picnic was interrupted by bears that forced them back into their car. After the trip, Gerhard told Frieda that he was planning a visit to Germany and asked if she would like to come along. She went, and during their stay they got engaged and married on the cruise boat *Italien*. It was a fairy tale sort of romance. He was several years older, and he had an 11-year-old son, Hans. His first wife had died years earlier.

The marriage was a good one. As it turned out, Frieda actually married Gerhard twice during this visit. In Germany, a couple was required to publicly announce the wedding at least four weeks in advance of the ceremony, and they had not done that. They did hear that if they went to Munich they could get married legally right away. So it was off to Munich, where they were married again with her mother as one of the witnesses

Frieda and Gerhard had one son, Frederick Thomas Herrmann, born April 6, 1955, in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. He now lives in Huntsville, Alabama. Hans Herrmann lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Frieda, Gerhard, and young Frederick made many trips back to Germany, and Frederick remembers that after one long trip he forgot how to speak English.

Frieda made a few trips back to Germany after her husband died in 1992. Frieda died in Huntsville on January 5, 2010. Her story is not unique. Thousands of young girls, most of them former BDM members, found their way to the United States after the war, but their stories are rarely told.

Author Don A. Gregory conducted extensive interviews with Frieda Streit Hermann for this article. He resides in Huntsville, Alabama

Bundesarchiv Bild 183-L05691, Photo Unknown

ABOVE: A volunteer squad of the National Socialist Women walks through the street in a small town in the Saar Palatinate in July 1940. This organization for adult German women flourished during the early years of the Third Reich. BELOW: A BDM leader shows a young girl how to operate a piece of machinery on the floor of a German armaments factory in August 1942. Due to labor shortages, children were often pressed into service doing jobs that adults might otherwise perform.

Bundesarchiv Bild 183-L07801, Photo Unknown

All images: Imperial War Museum, except where noted

Although lives were continuing to be lost, German resistance in northern Europe crumbled in the spring of 1945.

the final OFFENSIVE

BY DAVID H. LIPPMAN

"IT is very difficult to be an openly declared, courageous Nazi today, and to express one's faith freely," read the editorial in the *Volkischer Beobachter* newspaper, which further added, "We have no illusions now."

The official newspaper of the Nazi Party had good reason to sound a fearful note. As dawn broke on March 25, 1945, the British 21st Army Group had hacked a 30-mile-long and seven-mile deep bridgehead over the Rhine River. Operations Plunder and Varsity, Field Marshal Sir Bernard Law Montgomery's massive setpiece Rhine crossing, had succeeded perfectly at a small cost in Allied casualties: 3,968 for the British 2nd Army and 2,813 for the U.S. 9th Army. In turn, some 16,000 Germans had been taken prisoner.

Now, with Germany's last major barrier breached, there was little to stop Monty's 20 divisions and 1,600 tanks from driving deep into Germany and the Netherlands.

Even so, the drive would not be easy First, all the bridges across the Rhine had been blown, and British and American engineers had to replace them with Bailey bridges. Up and down the Wesel bridgehead, sappers and engineers were hard at work. Bulldozers carved out approaches to the riverbank while engineers scrambled with wrenches and iron bars to finish two Bailey bridges. Buffalo amphibious vehicles shuttled back and forth across the river, hauling supplies and troops.

British Major Roland Ward helped develop a system using wire ropes to winch tank carriers across the Rhine. The raft was composed of five large pontoons, about 25 feet long and five feet wide, connected with steel panels, with ramps at each end. One raft broke from its moorings. Major Ward commandeered a motorboat to take him out to the raft.

"I jumped on board and found the crew were petrified. Their motors wouldn't hold, they were drifting down the lines and the next stop was the German lines, you see. The officer, I think, had lost his head a bit. The anchor didn't seem to hold and the motors didn't work, but by a bit of luck someone had brought out a rope from the far side and he joined it up to a bulldozer. I thought, if he pulls too hard he'll break it. So I said, 'You can direct the motors by signaling with a whistle and your arms.' There was no radio or anything like that. They engaged the motors so that the rope pulled slowly. When we were halfway across, the Warrant Officer, who had kept his head, said to me, 'There is the end of the anchor cable. What shall I do?' I could see what he meant. I said, 'Let it go.' And that was it, because the raft swung round and we came in perfectly," he recalled.

Lieutenant Tom Flanagan of the 4th King's Own Scottish Borderers, part of the 52nd Lowland Division, crossed the Rhine that night over "Sussex Bridge." He recalled, "Our trucks were driven without lights except for the glow-light which shone on the white painted rear axle to enable following trucks to keep in touch in convoy. The narrowness of the Bailey bridge was made plain for the drivers by small lamps fixed to the sides of the girders placed every few yards along the way.

"As we drove up the ramp and onto the bridge I could hardly make out the swift flowing black depths of the river below nor could I hear anything but the noise from the engine of my Bedford Troop Carrier on which I rested my right arm, it being an overhead drive vehicle, as it ground its way along in low gear. Seated in the back, my HQ section, silent now as we slowly made our way, rocking up and down as the pontoons holding the structure moved with the weight of the lorry, into the cleared area of the west bank of the Rhine. Our packs strapped to our backs thrust us into an uncomfortable position in our seats and our steel helmets created an unaccustomed weight on our heads."

Crossing the Rhine, Corporal Dai Evans of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers recalled, "Each of us was given a number of rubberized linen bags, shaped rather like long sausages with tapes fastened to their ends. These were lifebelts. Inflated by mouth, then tied around our bodies, they were supposed to give us a chance if we were dumped into the river. There were no instructions as to how to wear them but someone had worked out that if tied around the waist they would very likely turn us over in the water due to the weight of our equipment. It was decided it would be better to fasten them under the armpits, tying the tapes to our epaulettes to prevent them slipping down. We were given enough for each of our men to wear and instructed to tell them that if by any chance they were pitched into the river they were not to struggle but to get rid of all the equipment they could, letting the lifebelt support them. As the Rhine was a very

Scottish soldiers crowd windows of the upper floors of a building in the city of Bremerhaven, Germany, watching Sherman tanks take part in a victory parade on May 12, 1945. The city sustained heavy damage during the final offensive of British Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery's 21st Army Group. This painting is by British war artist Edward Payne.

fast-flowing river they were on no account to fight it but to let it carry them downstream while they swam towards the bank. Rescue teams with boats were stationed further down to pick up anyone in the water."

So the Allied armies crossed the Rhine. The 11th Hussars led the famed 7th "Desert Rats" Armored Division across the Rhine on March 27. Colonel W. Wainmann, commanding the "Cherry Pickers," threw away the regiment's map-sheets as an indication that the 11th Hussars would never retrace their steps.

The 1st Royal Tank Regiment captured Heiden against light opposition, taking 18 guns and their crews, 10 trucks, and 60 prisoners on the 26th. Next day they had a harder time, losing a tank. As the rest of the vehicles tried to cross a stream by a flimsy wooden bridge, the bridge collapsed under the weight. Staff Sergeant Major Leonard Dauncey earned a Military Medal by organizing a party of men to build a ford or causeway. For three hours, under mortar and sniper fire that wounded three men, Dauncey and his crew finally succeeded and C Squadron got across the stream, amid rain.

The 11th Armored Division drove across the Rhine in heavy rain and entered the small town of Velen, where the local hotel served the advancing 8th Rifle Brigade and 3rd Royal Tank Regiment fresh bacon and eggs. Trooper Ernie Hamilton of the 15/19th Hussars collected nylon ropes used by the glider troopers, which were ideal for towing out tanks that got bogged down.

"We have won the Battle of the Rhine," Montgomery told his Army commanders in a new directive on March 28. The Allied plan called for the 21st Army Group's two armies, 1st Canadian and 2nd British, to advance at a high rate of speed to clear the North German Plain, seize the North Sea ports of Bremen, Emden, and Hamburg, and cut off the German defenders in the Netherlands. The U.S. 9th Army would be taken from Monty's forces and used to help surround the industrialized Ruhr district.

Most importantly, the Allied plan did not call for the Anglo-American armies to take Berlin. General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Allied Commander, in one of his most controversial decisions, had ceded that to the advancing Soviet Red Army. Historians would endlessly debate the wisdom of that order.

Regardless of the decision's wisdom, 21st Army Group still had to drive across northern Germany, and the Nazis would have something to say about that.

The problem for the Germans was simply that there was not much left. Six years of World War II had drained the German Army's strength. All the Germans had to throw against Monty's advancing troops were training establishments, battered parachute regiments, and the Volkssturm, consisting of old men and Hitler Youth armed with one-shot Panzerfaust rocket launchers. A senior German officer, seeing the youngsters tramping along with their Panzerfausts, asked, "What will they do after they fire them? Use the launchers as clubs?"

Even so, the Panzerfaust was a superb antitank weapon, and the Hitler Youth made up in determination and loyalty what they lacked in tactical skill. The Germans were fighting for their homes now, and the advancing British and Canadian troops could not count on a friendly reception when they entered towns and cities.

The Canadian 1st Army could count on a friendlier reception, as it was tasked with liberating the Netherlands. Ironically, it would face some of the fiercest resistance of the final campaign.

The Canadians were ordered to drive north between the Rhine and the Dutch-German border to cut off the considerable Nazi defenses in the Netherlands. The Allied high command feared that the Germans might open the dikes in Holland to the sea and flood vast sections of the country, which was also suffering through the "Hunger Winter" of short rations and desperation.

The first task was to clear the city of Emmerich to enable the Canadians to open a maintenance route over the Rhine. The 3rd Canadian Division's 7th Brigade was assigned to take the city. It faced elements of the 6th Parachute and 346th Infantry Divisions. The fighting was vicious, and the city was heavily bombed and shelled. Backed by British Crocodile flamethrowing tanks, the Canadians found

ABOVE: An amphibious British Buffalo landing craft plies the waters of the Rhine River during operations to reach the eastern bank of the great waterway, March 25, 1945. By the time Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery's final offensive commenced, German resistance was crumbling in the West. BELOW: Photographed amid the rubble of a destroyed German town on April 4, 1945, British commandos of the 1st Special Service Brigade point their weapons toward an area of suspected enemy resistance.

tough going.

"Enemy defenses consisted mainly of fortified houses and tanks and as each house and building had to be searched progress was slow," the 7th Brigade's war diary reported. "Our tanks in support found it almost impossible to maneuver due to well-sited road blocks and rubble."

In three days of fighting, the Canadians took Emmerich, suffering 173 casualties, including 44 killed. The 8th Brigade, coming up behind, then took the Hoch Elten feature, a hilltop that overlooked Emmerich. That enabled the Royal Canadian Engineers to start throwing a Class 40 Bailey bridge across the Rhine at noon on March 31. At 8 PM the following night, the 1,373-foot Melville Bridge, named for a former chief engineer of 1st Canadian Army, was open for business. The Canadians also built the longest Bailey bridge in the entire European campaign, the 1,814-foot Blackfriars Bridge.

The force behind the Blackfriars Bridge was the 30th Canadian Engineers Field Company under Lieutenant William Fernley Brundrit. When construction began on March 26, Brundrit "worked unceasingly without regard for shelling, eating and sleeping; aiding in construction and in arranging for the large quantities of stores and equipment to arrive at the job, at the right time and place. When the bridge was completed ... he fell asleep in his vehicle, completely exhausted." His feat earned him a Military Cross.

With the bridges in business, the 1st Canadian Army took back control of 2nd Canadian Corps, and for the first time both of Canada's corps were fighting side by side, with 1st Corps brought up from Italy in Operation Goldflake.

Backed by two more bridges, the 2nd Canadian Corps thundered across the Rhine at Emmerich with the 4th Canadian Armored Division and 1st Polish Armored Division in the lead. The first objective was the Twenthe Canal, held by the German 6th Parachute Division and some additional units.

The 4th Infantry Brigade hit the defense line in a night attack on April 2-3, crossing the river in storm boats, taking the Germans by surprise. Canadian troops captured German engineers who had been busy preparing positions for infantry who arrived too late to oppose the canal crossing. The Germans counterattacked, but 4th Brigade fended them off with light losses. The 4th Brigade's war diary commented, "The enemy tactics appear almost juvenile at times—he is doing everything the book says as usual, but his training here shows that the caliber of troops opposing us is not what it used to be. Each enemy attack suffered very heavy casualties and usually a number of POWs were taken—grubby, dirty, slender youths, boys, and old men."

British infantrymen of the 3rd Division root out snipers in the city of Lingen, Germany, on April 7, 1945.

The Canadian advance up the Ijssel River continued, with the 3rd Canadian and 1st Canadian Divisions leading the way. The objectives were the towns of Zutphen and Deventer and their bridges. The 3rd Division closed in on Zutphen, defended by 361st Infantry Division with a parachute training battalion under command. The German troops included numerous teenagers, brought up in the Hitler Youth, who fought hard. The Highland Light Infantry of Canada built a bridge with 4.2-inch mortar boxes reinforced with timber and ballast, and it proved strong enough to carry the supporting tanks of the Sherbrooke Fusiliers Regiment across the Ijssel.

Zutphen was liberated by the North Shore Regiment and Le Regiment Chaudiere, which found, "For the first time there was evidence that the enemy's attitude was gradually changing and although he fought well at times, the old tenacity was lacking," according to 8th Brigade's "Lessons Learned" report.

The 7th Brigade attacked Deventer from the east, and after a hard struggle entered the Dutch city. Once the Germans were down to their last defense line—an antitank ditch—they began to crumble. The Canadian advance cleared Deventer speedily with help from the Dutch Underground.

Operation Cannonshot was launched by the 1st Canadian Division halfway between Zutphen and Deventer to clear a route from Arnhem to Zutphen. Two veteran Canadian regiments, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry and the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada, crossed the river in Buffaloes, surprising the German defenders. The Seaforths found no opposition while the Princess Pats secured their ground after knocking out a French tank the Germans were using.

Five companies of engineers threw bridges across the Ijssel. On April 12, the 1st Canadian Brigade passed through the bridgehead and headed west toward Apeldoorn. The 48th Highlanders of Canada suffered a great loss. Their commanding officer, Lt. Col. D.A. McKenzie, was killed by a shell. At 6 AM on the 13th, the 1st Division reverted to 1st Canadian Corps and headed for Apeldoorn and Arnhem.

Meanwhile, the 2nd Canadian Corps continued its advance from Twente, racing up the Dutch-German border. On April 6, the 6th Infantry Brigade reached the Schipbeek Canal about eight miles east of Deventer. The Germans blew the only bridge in the area, but the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada crossed the damaged structure anyway and set up a bridgehead on the opposite bank.

With the advance moving forward briskly, the Allies threw in paratroops behind German lines to cause more chaos among the defenders. The 2nd and 3rd French Regiments de Chasseurs Parachutistes' 700 French SAS men were to harass the Germans and provide guides and information for the advancing Canadian 1st Army. Operation Amherst scattered French SAS teams behind German lines, and they captured 200 and killed 150 Germans, preventing the destruction of numerous bridges.

The 2nd Corps now moved on Groningen, near the North Sea. The fast-moving Canadians took a canal bridge intact west of Beilen on April 12 and took the town by surprise from the rear after two hours of fighting, seized Assen on April 13, and penetrated Groningen's southwestern suburbs on the same day. Everywhere Dutch civilians danced in the streets and cheered their liberators

Groningen was defended by miscellaneous German troops, including Dutch renegade SS men, who fought with the courage of men who knew they would face treason trials if captured. The Canadians fought hand-to-hand against the Germans, clearing out every room of four-story apartments. German troops deployed machine guns in basements, and Dutch SS men in civilian clothes sniped at the Canadian troops.

On the evening of April 14, the Essex Scottish found a bridge intact across a large canal in the southern part of the city, and the 5th Brigade moved across rapidly. "In spite of the severe fighting ... great crowds of civilians thronged the streets—apparently more excited than frightened by the sound of nearby rifle and machine-gun fire," reported the 2nd Division's war diary. Because of the civilians, 2nd Division held back its artillery and air strikes, accepting the possibility of delay and additional casualties.

The German commander and his staff surrendered Groningen on the 16th, but stubborn elements of the garrison held out a little longer. At the city's eastern edge, the Germans had raised a lift-bridge over the Van Starkenborgh Canal, and the mechanism to lower it was on the wrong side. Dutch civilians, one of whom was the bridge tender, offered to help. Accompanied by the Cameron Highlanders of Canada, the Dutch crossed the canal under fire on a ladder. The bridge tender was wounded, but he lowered the bridge. German resistance then collapsed.

The Canadians took 209 casualties at Groningen but captured approximately 2,400 POWs. In the course of their advance from the Rhine to the North Sea, the 3rd Canadian Division had fought forward 115 miles in 26 days, built 36 bridges, and captured 4,500 prisoners.

Meanwhile, the 2nd Corps' two armored divisions also rumbled ahead, northeastward to the Ems River. The 4th Armored Brigade made an assault crossing at Meppen, taking one casualty and quickly overrunning the town. Among the POWs captured were 17-year-olds with six to eight weeks of military experience.

After the 4th Armored crossed the Ems, German defenses began to weaken. A divisional staff officer said, "The enemy was, perhaps, never entirely out of control, but he appeared to be seriously disorganized. For the first time we began to meet the passive opposition of demolitions and mines rather more often than the active opposition of ground troops." The Canadians were slowed more by boggy terrain than German defenses

But at the town of Sogel, the Germans fought back with several counterattacks. The Lake Superior Regiment and Lincoln and Welland Regiment chased off the Germans but came under sniper fire from civilians. The Canadians retaliated by bulldozing a number of houses in the center of town

Another town faced bulldozing when the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada attacked and took Friesoythe. Their commander, Lt. Col. F.E. Wigle, was killed by a sniper. Rumors swirled that the sniper was in civilian clothes, and Friesoythe was ordered burned—whether by division or brigade headquarters is not known. Canadian Wasp flamethrowers trundled up and down the streets of the town, wrecking its center. There was no investigation by Canadian authorities.

Now the Canadians headed for their next objective, the city of Oldenburg, across the Kusten Canal. On April 16, the 10th Brigade attacked by boat across the canal. German defenders came from the 2nd Parachute Corps and a marine regiment. Covered by the New Brunswick Rangers' machine guns, the Canadians had their objectives in hand by dawn. The Germans counterattacked with infantry and a single self-propelled gun, which was beaten back. Engineers threw Algonquin Bridge over the canal under appalling conditions, and the British Columbia Regiment crossed immediately.

While the 2nd Corps fanned out across northwest Germany, the 1st Corps prepared to attack into the Netherlands. The first task, to clear out Arnhem and Oosterbeek, was assigned to Maj. Gen. S.B. Rawlins' 49th West Riding Division and Maj. Gen. Bert Hoffmeister's 5th Canadian Armored Division. Operation Destroyer kicked off on April 2 with the 49th crossing the Rhine west of Arnhem. Resistance was slight despite German propaganda communiqués referring to "fierce fighting" in the Arnhem sector. The first outfit across the Neder Rijn was the same battalion that had crossed the Seine and the Dutch frontier first, the Hallamshire Battalion of the York and Lancaster Regiment.

By April 5, "The Island," the section of land between Nijmegen and Arnhem, scene of fierce fighting during Operation Market-Garden in the fall, was in British hands, and Operation Quick Anger, the attack on Arnhem, followed next. The 2nd Gloucesters manhandled their assault boats over the dike in front of the river to attack Scheisprong Fort, suffering 32 casualties, but took 60 German prisoners.

The 2nd Essex followed and found the remains of the British defense of the Oosterbeek perimeter as they advanced. Lieutenant A.A. Vince of the 2nd Essex recalled, "We saw the evidence of the tragedy of September 1944, the broken guns and equipment, the little shallow slits the Airborne had dug in a few seconds and from which they had fought for days. We saw the little white crosses in corners of Dutch

gardens, often with an inscription such as '31 Unknown British Soldiers.' On top of the cross would be a weather-stained Red Beret placed there by the Germans as a tribute to the cream of fighting men."

The first battalion into Arnhem was the 2nd South Wales Borderers, which found the city badly wrecked from the 1944 and 1945 battles.

Major Godfrey Hartland of the 1st/4th King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry recalled, "At first light with the aid of some Canadian tanks we attacked some German positions in the grounds of Sonsbeek Hospital. It was to be our last company attack in Northwest Europe. The company was digging in, having taken the objective, when the customary German counterattack by shell and mortar fire arrived, landing on a section of the right hand platoon. Three were killed and two were wounded. Sad to lose those three splendid young soldiers, Geordie Alcock, M. Durham, and F. Lees, who had fought so many battles with the company only to lose their lives so late in the war."

The German defenders were mostly Dutch renegades of the SS Landstorm Nederland, who fought with determination. The Germans had evacuated the city's population.

The 56th Brigade attacked across the Ijssel River in Buffaloes with heavy air and artillery support. Canadian tanks of the Ontario Regiment and British infantry fought through the ruins, losing 62 dead and 134 wounded. More than 1,600 Germans were taken prisoner and twice that number put out of action by the time Arnhem was taken on April 16.

Next up was the capture of Apeldoorn to cut off western Holland from Germany. The 1st Canadian Infantry Division, under Maj. Gen. Harry Foster, and the 5th Canadian Armored Division were given the job. The Germans delayed the Canadian advance with mines—sometimes naval shells planted in the roads—and snipers

German defense measures were increasingly desperate. On April 12, SS Reichsfuhrer Heinrich Himmler issued a decree that read, "Towns, which are usually important communications centers, must be defended at any price. The battle commanders appointed for each town are personally held responsible for compliance with this order. Neglect of this duty on the part of the battle commander, or the attempt on the part of any civil servant to induce such neglect, is punishable by death."

The Canadians moved on Apeldoorn but were reluctant to hurl airpower and artillery into a city filled with refugees and 72,600 inhabitants. The Canadians had 5th Armored swing past Apeldoorn on the left, cutting it off, while the 1st Canadian Division attacked it from the east.

German resistance in the city disintegrated on the night of April 16-17. By noon on the 17th, the 1st Canadian Brigade had taken over the old German headquarters as their own, to wild rejoicing by the citizens. "National colors of the Netherlands were flying in the brilliant sunlight from almost every house and shop," recorded the 1st Division's summary of operations. The 1st Division suffered 506 casualties in liberating Apeldoorn, taking 40 German officers and 2,515 enlisted men prisoner.

The Canadian 1st Corps now aimed to clear western Holland with Operation Cleanser. The 5th Armored Division moved through "densely wooded sandhills, making observation and mutual support extremely difficult and often impossible. Movement off roads around roadblocks was accomplished only through the sheer weight of the tanks forcing their way through the trees." But the speed of the Canadian advance caught the Germans off balance. At Deelen, the headquarters staff of the 858th Grenadier Regiment was overrun. The commander conceded that he had been "taken completely by surprise when attacked by tanks and found his dispositions all wrong."

On April 15, Lord Strathcona's Horse headed for Otterloo, attacking by night through deep water-filled ditches and low marshy ground. The Germans continued to withdraw, leaving behind demolitions and booby traps. On the night of April 16-17, they counterattacked against the Irish Regiment of Canada and Hoffmeister's own headquarters with artillery and mortars. All headquarters personnel were soon involved in the battle with Canadian artillery firing over open sites, demolishing a church tower in their efforts to shorten the range. At dawn the headquarters tanks and Irish counterattacked, joined by Wasp flamethrowers. The Germans suffered 300 casualties, with between 75 and 100 killed. The Irish lost 22 men and the 17th Field Regiment 25 and three guns knocked out.

By the morning of the 17th, the 5th Armored was wrapping up Operation Cleanser, driving all the way to the Ijsselmeer. The division captured 34 German officers and 1,755 other ranks, many of them Dutch "volunteers" who served in the Wehrmacht to avoid conscription as slave laborers. Now the Canadians could assault the Grebbe Line and drive into western Holland.

Standing in the way was a force more powerful than the Wehrmacht's disintegrating legions, the German Reichskommissar for Holland, the obnoxious and cynical Austrian Artur Seyss-Inquart, who warned that any Allied attack into western Holland would be met by his opening the dikes and the horrendous flooding of the nation's lands below sea level.

The Netherlands was in terrible condition by this time—the winter of 1944-1945 is forever known in that nation as the "Hunger Winter" because of desperate food shortages. Dutch residents were barely surviving on as little as 500 calories a day. Heating coal and coke were also

BELOW: British half-tracks have yielded a dirt road to advancing Stuart light tanks and other vehicles of the 15th Scottish Division. This photo was taken on April 13, 1945, as the Allies advanced toward the Elbe River, deep inside Germany. OPPOSITE: Advancing near Brelingen, Germany, on April 10, 1945, these British paratroopers of the 6th Airborne Division are using handcarts and bicycles to facilitate their forward movement.

in short supply, forcing starving and exhausted Dutchmen to chop down forests and cut up furniture to stay warm.

All across the Netherlands, citizens suffered under the German heel. Parents sent their children out to steal; women sold themselves to German soldiers for a few cans of soup; rich and poor traveled on rickety bicycles or bleeding feet hundreds of miles to barter watches or bed linens with farmers for potatoes or eggs. The "hunger trippers" often had their food confiscated on the way home by equally famished German troops. By April, the average Dutch city dweller's ration was down to 230 calories per day. Ten-year-old Henry A. van der Zee recalled, "My days were spent, for the most part, in queuing for whatever the ration cards promised us. It was so cold outside that I still remember the tears of pain and misery turning to icicles on my cheeks."

"It is already famine," Dutch food officials wired London on April 24. "In 10 days it will be death."

Seyss-Inquart showed his power over nature by opening a dike near Den Helder to inundate the country's newest polder, a 75-square-mile area. He then warned the Canadians that if they attacked over the Grebbe Line he would blow another dike between Rotterdam and Gouda, causing massive flooding all the way north to Amsterdam—effectively destroying western Holland. Furthermore, he had orders to leave Holland a "field of ruins."

Instead, in January Seyss-Inquart summoned a Dutch government official who had stayed behind under orders, Dr. H.M. Max Hirschfield, to discuss the growing crisis in western Holland and possible solutions. Hirschfeld suggested negotiations. The cynical Seyss-Inquart knew that Germany was doomed but was reluctant to risk his own neck by opening negotiations. He suggested a "basis of agreement" between the German forces and the Allies so that a status quo could be maintained

The Dutch government-in-exile, now back home in the liberated areas of the Netherlands, opened secret talks with Seyss-Inquart. The Dutch proposed that the Canadians stop their advance on the Grebbe Line. In return, the Gestapo would cease executions, decently house political prisoners, and any culprits who carried out attacks on German installations would not receive the death sentence. There would be no further inundations. The Germans would also help facilitate the opening of Rotterdam's port to barges bearing food and coal from the south.

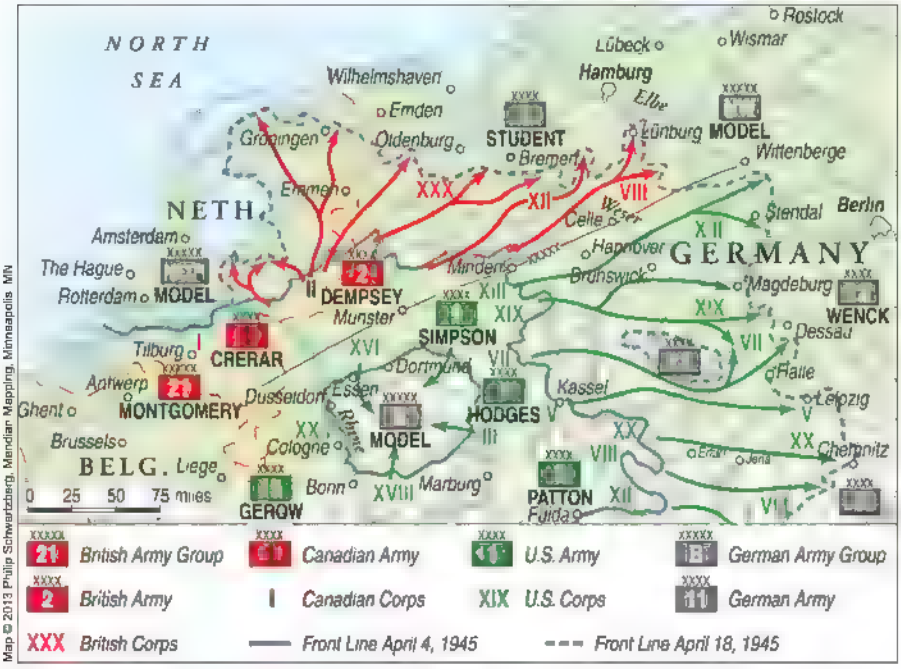
Seyss-Inquart emphasized that there would be no official surrender, and the occupation would be maintained. Outwardly, the Canadians would merely stop on the Grebbe Line and not attack any farther.

When this plan reached 1st Canadian Army, the Canadians saw advantages to it—a massive assault across the Grebbe Line would take Holland, but at a huge price in both Canadian and Dutch lives. With the war nearly over, it was time to save lives on both sides of the front line.

The higher Allied leadership also agreed, with Winston Churchill fearing operations "would be marked by fighting and inundations and the destruction of the life of Western Holland," and General Eisenhower writing that "for sheer humanitarian reasons something must be done at once." Ike agreed to Seyss-Inquart's proposal, and the 1st Canadian Army ground to a halt on the Grebbe River

Meanwhile, the British 2nd Army began streaking across the Rhine, heading for the North German ports. The Germans fought for every hamlet and town, usually with small groups of infantry—often Hitler Youth—armed with Panzerfausts, sometimes supported by Tiger tanks.

Despite this, the 2nd Army made a rapid advance toward Bremen. The 12th Corps



Map © 2013 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN

ABOVE: During the spring of 1945, the forces of the Allied 21st Army Group launched a decisive offensive against weakening German resistance, capturing thousands of prisoners and occupying much of northern Germany. BELOW: Moving through the Dutch town of Ede on April 17, 1945, Sherman tanks of the 5th Canadian Armored Division and infantrymen of the 11th Royal Scots Fusiliers are watched by civilians newly liberated from five years of brutal and oppressive Nazi occupation.

During the 21st Army Group drive toward the German city of Bremen, this Sherman tank attempted to cross a stream on an unstable bridge and collapsed it in the process. Armored vehicles that followed were compelled to seek another crossing point.

reached the Ems and turned south to cross the Dortmund-Ems Canal, where the 7th Armored Division took up the fight. The division crossed the Ems on April 3 and captured the town of Ibbenburen after a stiff fight against snipers, many of them officer cadets and noncommissioned officers from the local tactical training school.

Platoon commander Robert Davies of the 2nd Devonshires recalled, "The leading platoon was carried forward on tanks. When we met with resistance we left the vehicles behind and went on with or without tanks, depending on the countryside. We spent a lot of time sitting on the back of the tanks going in, and the only snag was that you could not hear anyone firing at you for the noise of the engines and the tracks. One man was kneeling between my knees, speaking to me, I had my back to the turret, and the next moment he fell dead. When the company went in we followed our own creeping barrage, and when we got to the heights we had to winkle out the [German officer] cadets who were well dug-in. They had been badly shelled but they were really tough. Afterwards, when we were collecting the wounded, I found one boy under a bush, who spoke perfect English, and asked me if the stretcher bearers had gone. I said, 'Yes,' and he said, 'In that case I'll die.' It was just as well that he did. He was very good-looking but had no arms or legs."

The Ibbenburen battle was wild. Corporal Edward Chapman of the 3rd Monmouths staged a one-man stand against repeated German counterattacks, driving them back with his Bren gun. Once the attacks were temporarily driven off, Chapman went out alone to recover his wounded company commander, who was, unfortunately, dead. Chapman himself was wounded and refused to be evacuated

"Throughout the action Corporal Chapman displayed outstanding gallantry and superb courage. Single-handed he repulsed the attacks of well-led, determined troops and gave his battalion time to reorganize on a vital piece of ground overlooking the only bridge across the canal. His magnificent bravery played a very large part in the capture of this vital ridge and in the successful development of subsequent operations," read his Victoria Cross citation. Chapman survived the ordeal to receive his VC from King George VI in July 1945, and he died in 2002.

Attached to the 7th Armored was the 1st Commando Brigade, which attacked and captured Osnabruck on April 4. Commando Bill Sadler recalled, "The brigade entered Osnabruck on the early hours of Sunday morning, suffering some casualties from Spandau fire which produced the usual Commando reaction: 'Bash on regardless.' We sprinted across the open ground in groups and the Spandau was knocked out by a well-placed PIAT bomb. We had completed the capture of the town by 10 AM, mopping up a few pockets of resistance and taking about 400 prisoners, including some Hungarians. The local Gestapo chief was shot dead in his office by our Field Security Officer, Major Viscount de Jonghe—then we went on to the Weser."

There were humorous moments in the great advance for the "Desert Rats." One patrol captured a German staff car, finding inside four high-ranking German officers, complete with maps and documents and a case of cognac. Also, C Squadron of the 11th Hussars captured some Germans, one of which turned out to be 60 years old, wearing carpet slippers, and carrying a walking stick, without which he would have fallen down.

The 8th Corps reached the Weser on April 5. The 7th Armored found the bridges over the river destroyed and had to turn west for Wildeshausen and Delmenhorst to cut off the retreat of the 1st Parachute Army.

The 11th Armored Division fought hard battles in the Teutoburger Wald against the Clausewitz Panzer Division, made up of training units. The British tanks entered the small town of Tecklenburg to find no white flags flying, unlike in other conquered communities. The Germans fought back with Clausewitz regulars and Volkssturm against the British, who battled down narrow, twisted streets. By nightfall the town was conquered, charred, and burning.

Next up for the 11th Armored was the Rive Weser, where the Germans decided to make a stand on the 5th, blowing bridges in front of the advancing British troops. The 11th Armored faced the 12th SS Panzer Division. The 1st Herefords and 8th Rifle Brigade were sent over the river in assault boats under

heavy and light antiaircraft fire. The two battalions hacked out a bridgehead, and Royal Engineers began throwing a Bailey bridge over the Weser.

At this point, the Luftwaffe finally intervened, with Junkers Ju-87 Stuka dive bombers and Focke-Wulf FW-190 and Messerschmitt Me-109 fighters all bearing down on the British. A British soldier recalled, "Our own Brens and Brownings chattered constantly against the marauders but they were quite futile, the tracers visibly bouncing off the armored bellies of the Boche planes as they swooped low over the rooftops."

Another Briton grabbed a Bren gun and fired a stream of bullets into the nose of a diving Heinkel bomber. "I watched the tracer drift almost lazily into its center front. The aircraft veered sharply to port, lost height, drifted over some trees and disappeared."

Royal Air Force Hawker Tempest fighter bombers arrived at midday on the 6th to fend off the Luftwaffe, but the 12th SS and 100th Pioneer Brigade put up a firm defense. The Herefords set up their headquarters in a farmhouse that had the advantage of having vast quantities of preserves, bottled fruit, and vegetables, plus chianti and hams. The Germans attacked in waves, and the British crushed the attack with barrages of artillery. "That'll teach the bloody Boche," said a British officer.

The Luftwaffe would not yield. Its bombers destroyed a Bailey bridge. With the British pinned down by heavy fire and no way to get tanks over, they were forced to withdraw. Luckily, the tough 6th Airborne Division had built a bridge at nearby Petershagen, and the 11th Armored used the airborne division's bridge to maintain the pace of the offensive.

Next was the Aller River, and the 11th Armored clanked toward it, battling determined Hitler Youth snipers. At Husum, the 4th King's Shropshire Light Infantry lost 13 dead and 30 wounded to Hitler Youth, but in turn killed 80 and captured 120. The Inns of Court Regiment moved in to help the 11th Armored.

Peter Reeve of the Inns of Court Regiment recalled, "They were in the throes of a bloody battle with an SS unit who had looted the village and shot several KSLI prisoners in cold blood in the back of the head. We were met by a hail of fire from Schmeissers. An SS officer crouched with his machine gun cradled as we loosed off bursts from the Browning. He went on firing till he was cut almost in half. Late in the evening all opposition ceased—a grisly pile of burned bodies being the only memento."

The 11th Armored rolled on, liberating POW camps and seizing German ammunition dumps. The division even captured a V-2 rocket-launching site. Bill Close of the 3rd Royal Tank Regiment wrote, "No one wanted to take any risks anymore. The men in lead tanks knew they would be the first to get it if they bumped into a last-ditch battle-group. People were reluctant to drive around corners. I gave orders that no chances were to be taken with bazooka merchants."

The British advanced through rich Prussian corn land, with well-stocked farms, a peaceful part of the Reich that had not been touched by war. Still the SS and Hitler Youth fought on. At Steimbke, the British had to launch a setpiece attack into the village. Noel Bell recalled, "The SS fought fanatically and every house had to be cleared individually. Our stretcher-bearers were fired on, which spurred us on even more. No quarter was given or asked and very few SS prisoners lived to tell the tale."

When the British reached the Aller, they again found all bridges blown, but the 1st Commando Brigade forced a river crossing at Essel. The 11th Armored borrowed another 6th Airborne bridge and drove through heath and pine to capture a Luftwaffe airfield complete with 12 aircraft.

On the night of April 11, the 4th King's Shropshire Light Infantry crossed the River Aller to widen the commando bridgehead, and the British were heading for the Elbe.

Germany was now a picture of wrecked towns and villages. On April 16, the Allies called off the strategic bombing campaign against Germany because most targets had been captured and those left were about to be—further bombing would only provide defenders with more rubble.

While SS men, paratroopers, and Hitler Youth fought on, the rest of the German Army's morale had collapsed. The rate of desertion was so high that Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, commanding the German forces in the West, used his best men to round up the faint of heart who flooded to the rear whenever a battle started.

"The enormously costly battle of the last half-year and constant retreat and defeat had reduced officers and men to a dangerous state of exhaustion," he wrote. "Many officers were nervous wrecks, others affected in health, others simply incompetent, while there was a dangerous shortage of junior officers. In the ranks strengths were unsatisfactory, replacements arriving at the front insufficiently trained, with no combat experience, and, anyways, too late. They were accordingly no asset in action. Only where an intelligent commander had a full complement of experienced subalterns and a fair nucleus of elder men did units hold together."

With much of northern Germany now occupied by advancing British and Canadian forces, the "no fraternization" rule went into effect, barring Allied troops from even giving candy to German urchins. But the Tommies broke it anyway. From meeting children it was a short step to meeting their older sisters or widowed and lonely mothers.

Meanwhile, the advance continued. The 46th Royal Marine Commando attacked a wood near Hademstorf, and the Commandos were astonished to find their opponents to be a German marine division. Unlike the British marines, the German marines were simply sailors released from immobile warships. The British took 60 prisoners.

The 3rd Royal Tank Regiment ran into Tiger tanks trying to contain the British bridgehead over the Aller River. John Langdon, in a Comet tank, saw the Germans coming, and recalled, "About 300 yards away I saw its 88mm gun slowly traversing on us. We fired. Head-on as it was to us we could not hope to knock the tank out. We were outgunned and if I wanted to save my tank and crew there was only one thing to be done." The Comet was reversed into cover, knocking over 40-foot fir trees. But the next day, in a rematch, the British "brewed up" one Tiger and forced the other to withdraw.

On Friday, April 13, the Germans counterattacked the bridgehead in force, and 300 Germans died on the field. The following day, the Cheshires attacked Winsen, defended by the staff and students of a nearby antitank officers' training unit equipped with 88mm guns, 75mm self-propelled guns, and piles of Panzerfausts. The Germans bombarded the British with Nebelwerfers, multibarreled mortars, and the offensive was slow going. By 6 PM, the woods were cleared for a cost of three officers and 11 other ranks killed, two officers and 29 other ranks wounded. It was the hardest day's fighting for the battalion since it landed in Europe.

On the same day, a German staff car with a large white flag carrying two German medical corps officers arrived at the Cheshires' headquarters. They claimed to have been sent by the commandant of Belsen Concentration Camp with orders to surrender the facility to the nearest British troops.

The 11th Armored Division sent in a detachment, and Major Derrick Sington of the Intelligence Corps became the first Allied soldier to enter the notorious concentration camp. Passing through the main gates, barrack blocks, and huts, he found an inner compound.

"It reminded me of the entrance to a zoo. We came into a smell of ordure—like the smell

of a monkey house. A sad, blue smoke floated like ground mist between the low buildings. I had tried to imagine the interior of a concentration camp, but I had not imagined it like this. Nor had I imagined the strange, simian throng, who crowded the barbed wire fences surrounding their compounds, with their shaven heads and their obscene striped penitentiary suits," he wrote.

"We had been welcomed before but the half-credulous cheers of these almost lost men, of these clowns in terrible motley, who had once been Polish officers, land workers in the Ukraine, Budapest doctors and students in France, impelled a stronger emotion and I had to fight back my tears."

Built to hold 8,000 prisoners, Belsen now had more than 56,000 crammed into 80 single-story huts, where they lay on wooden shelves, dead and dying huddled together.

The 11th Armored dashed into the camp, but it was 24 hours before the tankers could take full control of it. Once they did, they found more horror. There were some 10,000 unburied bodies lying about the camp.

The appalling situation soon became the responsibility of the 2nd Army's Chief Medical Officer, Brigadier Hugh Glyn Hughes, who had worried days before about the possibility of infectious diseases at the camps the Army would be liberating.

"No photograph, no description, could bring home the horrors I saw," Glyn Hughes said later. "The huts overflowed with inmates in every state of emaciation and disease. They were suffering from starvation, gastroenteritis, typhus, typhoid, tuberculosis. There were dead everywhere, some in the same bunks as the living. Lying in the compounds, in uncovered mass graves, in trenches, in the gutters, by the side of the barbed wire surrounding the camp and by the huts, were some 10,000 more. In my 30 years as a doctor, I had never seen anything like it."

Hughes moved in field hospitals, but it was not enough. Under British guard, both the SS camp warders and civilians from neighboring communities came in to bury the dead.

The camp's commandant, the appalling Joseph Kramer, was taken into custody. A furious British soldier told him, "When they hang you, I hope you die slowly." He was indeed hanged after his war crimes trial.

Another Briton provided a shocking account of the camp for the world. BBC reporter Richard Dimbleby sobbed into his microphone on April 19th: "I picked my way over corpse after corpse in the gloom, until I heard one voice raised above the gentle undulating moaning. I found a girl, she was a living skeleton, impossible to gauge her age for she had practically no hair left, and her face was only a yellow parchment sheet with two holes in it for eyes. She was stretching out her stick of an arm and gasping something, it was 'English, English, medicine, medicine,' and she was trying to cry but didn't have enough strength. And beyond her down the passage and in the hut there were the convulsive movements of dying people too weak to raise themselves from the floor."

Dimbleby watched a woman, "distraught to the point of madness," fling herself at a British soldier, begging for milk for her baby

"She laid the mite on the ground and threw herself at the sentry's feet and kissed his boots. And when, in his distress he asked her to get up, she put the baby in his arms and ran off crying that she would find milk for it because there was no milk left in her breast. And when the soldier unwrapped the bundle of rags to look at the child, he found that it had been dead for days ... this day at Belsen was the most horrible of my life."

The British were in no mood to trifle with the Germans after this shocking discovery and moved briskly to take Hamburg and Bremen.

Bremen was up first. Operation Bremen began on April 13, with the 3rd Infantry Division attacking into the city's suburbs. Opposing a British division that had landed on Sword Beach on D-Day were an SS training battalion, antiaircraft crews, Volkssturm senior citizens, Bremen police officers, and U-boat and R-boat crews taken from their immobile naval vessels.

The 1st South Lancasters led the 8th Brigade's attack up a main road, and Bren carrier driver Joe Garner and his pals dismounted from their vehicles and rushed a house. "We managed to kill and wound some of the enemy

After liberating the concentration camp at Belsen, British soldiers force SS guards to carry the emaciated bodies of the dead to a common grave for burial. Belsen was the scene of unspeakable atrocities committed by the Nazis against Jews and other prisoners.

Library of Congress

and take the remainder prisoner. Meanwhile our antitank detachment had arrived and took a position about 20 yards away from the house. I carried out my usual looting recce—looking for Nazi memorabilia—nothing worth bothering with. Going into the cellar, however, we discovered the shivering house owners sheltering therein."

The brigade drove up the straight road, past objective lines named Penny, Farthing, Dime, and Mark with mixed groups of infantry and Churchill flamethrowing tanks. German troops pinned down the 1st Suffolks until the tanks clattered up and set fire to the defenders' houses.

For days the 3rd Division battled for the small houses of Bremen's suburbs, taking casualties that included 2nd East Yorks' second-in-command, Major C.K. "Banger" King, who had inspired his men on D-Day by reciting Henry V's classic speech to them. But the Germans could not stop the British advance.

The division's commander, Maj. Gen. "Bolo" Whistler, wrote in his diary, "We have captured five officers and 1,259 men on April 15th and another 1,800 between 15-19th. We have killed about 200-300 more. Not much shelling from the Boche for which I am truly thankful. Lovely weather! Had a close look at Bremen yesterday. It appears rather undamaged in spite of Bomber Harris and his efforts."

On April 21, Edward C. Charlton earned the last Victoria Cross won in Europe in World War II. His tank unit had just helped an infantry platoon seize the town of Wistedt, and the Germans put in a counterattack consisting of officer cadets supported by three self-propelled guns. Three of the four Irish Guards tanks were hit, and Charlton's was disabled by a complete electrical failure before the attack began. Charlton was ordered to dismount the turret machine gun and support the infantry.

Charlton, on his own authority, took the machine gun and advanced in full view of the attacking Germans, firing the weapon from his hip as he did so and inflicting heavy German casualties. The lead German company was halted, and this allowed the rest of the Guards a respite in which to reorganize and retire. Charlton continued his bold attack, even when he was wounded in his left arm.

Charlton placed the machine gun on a fence, where he launched a further attack before his left arm was hit again by enemy fire, becoming shattered and useless. Charlton, now with just one usable arm, carried on his attack until a further wound and loss of blood resulted in the Guardsman collapsing. His courageous and selfless disregard for his own safety allowed the rest of the Irish Guards troop and infantry to escape. He later died of the wounds.

His Victoria Cross is on display at the Irish Guards Regimental Headquarters at Wellington Barracks in London. He is buried in Becklingen War Cemetery in Germany.

Bremen fought hard. The defenders had advantages, including low-lying land that was partially flooded, which made it impregnable to a conventional tank and infantry assault. The British called in RAF Bomber Command to plaster the city's considerable defenses, which ranged from heavy flak guns to Hitler Youth.

One of the defenders, Werner Ellebeck, recalled, "We had military training, although it didn't always make sense to us. However, one thing we were drilled in very thoroughly was the use of the Panzerfaust—our task was to destroy tanks. We were provided with few other weapons. The order was 'find them yourselves,' which we were happy to do. We managed to get hold of a lot of weapons from abandoned camps and flak batteries, so that most of the company possessed Panzerfausts and the rest had a collection of carbines, hand grenades, and a few machine guns. Armed with these, we were filled with great confidence."

But the civilian population lived in terror in air raid bunkers. "A terrible, claustrophobic squeeze would be an understatement to describe the masses of people herded together in here. These people are unwashed and ungroomed—there is no fresh water—and often the air is barely breathable. Fainting and nausea are common but anything vaguely approaching sanitary conditions is not even talked about anymore. Flu, throat infections, and the like are gaining the upper hand on a daily basis," wrote Albrecht Mertz.

Outside, diehard Nazis handed out propaganda messages, which included such statements as "The German Volk is determined to fight to the last breath," and "Only cowards surrender." Any sign of a white flag would be punished by death.

The RAF hammered Bremen, joined by British artillery. By April 21, there was still no sign of surrender. "A handful of madmen are in charge," wrote one disillusioned citizen. "Everything is covered in a chalky layer of grayish red ... the road is strewn with tree branches and rubble."

Lieutenant General Sir Brian Horrocks, commanding 30th Corps, which was attacking Bremen, gave the city's defenders an opportunity to surrender, hurling an ultimatum in 4,000 artillery shells at the Germans. Still no response. On April 24, Horrocks sent in the 52nd Lowland Division and the 3rd Infantry Division, which crossed the flooded areas on Buffaloes while the RAF and artillery pounded the defenders

The bombing and shelling had the desired impact. The 2nd King's Shropshire Light Infantry took 200 prisoners. The Norfolks reported, "The softening-up of Habenhausen had been complete, and those of the enemy who had not made off were only too glad to give up without a fight.... By 6 that evening it was all over, and a few locals, headed by the village policeman, were filling in bomb-craters under the supervision of the Pioneer Officer."

The main battle would clearly be fought out-

side the city, and the 2nd Royal Ulster Rifles crossed the Weser under full moonlight in Buffaloes, facing heavy antitank and flak gun fire. Corporal D. Lambourn earned a Military Medal by charging a German position and taking it. The Royal Ulster Rifles bagged five officers and 128 other ranks in the assault, and their boss, Lt. Col. J. Drummond, earned a Distinguished Service Order for commanding it.

The 185th Brigade attacked at night as well, relying on Buffaloes to cross the Weser. Marcus Cunliffe recalled, "The noise of [the Buffalo] engines was drowned by the greater thunder of the artillery barrage. To the inhabitants of Bremen crouching in their shelters, it must have all sounded like the final intimation of doom. Crammed into the 'holds' of the Buffaloes the Warwicks could only see the sky overhead traversed at five minute intervals by the red trace of three Bofors shells over the objective as a guide to direction."

Everything went well in the effort to take the causeway over the Weser, and by noon it was in British hands. By now, the German defenses were harsher in their verbiage than in battle—most defending Germans seemed to give up soon after being battered by British shells.

The drive into Bremen continued through the 26th. That day, Brigadier W. Kempster, commanding the 9th Brigade, found "the Hun was utterly demoralized, 2nd RUR just walked on to their objectives and by 9:30 AM I reported to Division that we'd done our job—nearly 30 hours in advance of the estimate."

Raymond Burt of the 22nd Dragoons wrote, "So this was how the city was falling—without fight, in rain, and betrayed by those who had brought it into its present squalor. For all their boasts and threats, the Nazi leaders had gone and the city was abandoned to a few thousand AA gunners and marines and the old men and women and children who waited our arrival in the air raid shelters. The advances into the suburbs were something of a formality. But they were carried out block by block, with care and precision—companies and supporting tanks leapfrogging through one another along the silent and mined streets. It looked formidable enough; the road blocks were defensible. Slit-trenches and antitank ditches had been dug across street intersections: enormous landmines had been laid and wired ready for explosion by the roadsides. The windows of the ruined houses provided the 'heroic twilight' of the Nazis and the city of Bremen. But no shot was fired

"Hitler's war was running down—it had collapsed into a dreary mopping-up operation which went on because no one in authority had the desire to cry 'Stop!'"

ABOVE: British Sherman tanks and accompanying infantrymen advance along the streets of Bremen, Germany, on April 25, 1945. The port city on the Weser River was a major objective of the final offensive mounted by the Allied 21st Army Group, commanded by Field Marshal Montgomery, in the spring of 1945. OPPOSITE: Two members of a Hitler Youth infantry unit trained to attack Allied armored formations stand with their hands up as a British soldier guards them with his Sten gun. The young Nazis were captured while riding bicycles with their Panzerfaust antitank weapons attached. British soldiers were surprised by the youth of many of these combatants.

With Bremen falling, the next objective was the Elbe River, and Monty prepared a setpiece crossing of it. But Eisenhower wanted the Elbe taken with great speed, to beat the Soviets into Schleswig-Holstein and Denmark, so he ordered Montgomery to take the Elbe on the run and assigned the U.S. 18th Airborne Corps to Monty's right flank with orders to cross the Elbe at Bleckede.

The 505th Parachute Regiment, veterans of four drops, was assigned the task, going over by night on April 29 in collapsible wooden boats. Colonel William Ekman's paratroopers fished the defending and sleepy Germans out of their foxholes with rifles, using flashlights to find them. By dawn, the paratroopers had secured the bridgehead, and engineers threw pontoon bridges across the Elbe to enable 18th Corps' armor to move across under heavy shellfire. Major General Matthew Ridgway, the 18th Corps commander, inspired the troops by walking out onto the unfinished bridge under the shelling, earning a second Silver Star.

That day, the British also continued their offensive, with the 7th Armored Division heading into the ruined city of Hamburg. General L.O. Lyne, commanding the Desert Rats, sent Maj. Gen. Alwin Woltz, the German commander in Hamburg, a six-point letter demanding the city's surrender. Negotiations went back and forth and at 7 PM on May 1, a large black Mercedes car with an even larger white flag arrived in the D Company area of the 9th Durham Light Infantry bearing two officers from Woltz's staff, ready to surrender the city. They were followed by hordes of German troops and civilians, including the champion boxer Max Schmeling.

That night German radio announced what the British press called the "most dramatic news of the war," the death of Adolf Hitler. With Hitler's death, German resistance completely crumbled. The 11th Armored reached Lubeck on the Baltic ahead of the Soviets, and the 6th Airborne achieved Wismar to link up with the Red Army

With Hitler dead, his successor was Admiral Karl Donitz in Flensburg, Schleswig-Holstein, and his first move was to send a delegation under Admiral Hans-Georg von Friedeburg to Field Marshal Montgomery's headquarters on the Luneberg Heath to surrender the forces facing the Soviets to Montgomery.

The field marshal would have none of that. After showing the German delegation their positions on his situation map—more accurately than the Germans had previously understood—Monty demanded the surrender of the forces facing him. Friedeburg broke into tears. On May 4, the Germans opposing Montgomery surrendered.

The surrender set off a wave of related ceremonies. Maj. Gen. James Gavin and the 82nd Airborne took the surrender of General Kurt von Tippelskirch's 21st Army along with 150,000 men on May 2 in a "cold and

Continued on page 78

Hopeful snipers learned their trade before taking to the battlefields of the Eastern Front.

Training Stalin's Sharpshooters

BY KEVIN M. HYMEL

SNIPERS PLAYED AN important a role in World War II, just as much as any tank, airplane, or artillery piece Stalking in the shadows, poised in one spot for hours, snipers waited out their prey and struck with deadly accuracy Soviet snipers came to prominence during the defensive phase of the war, 1941 to 1943, culminating in the Battle of Stalingrad. After that, the advantage shifted to German snipers as the Soviets made rap'd advances. In the rubble-filled streets of Stalingrad, or on the Steppe, the Soviets trained new snipers in the art of concealment and precision firing At the height of World War II the Red Army produced 220 snipers

Captain Valsily Zaytsev was the Soviet Union's most famous sniper, killing an estimated 400 Germans, but other snipers also racked up impressive numbers. Sergeant Nikolai Turtsev killed 135 Germans, Sergeant Mikhail Markovichenko killed 210 Germans and damaged two tanks, and Sergeant Fedor Pekov killed 344 Germans. They would all take time off from the front lines to teach the tactics and mechanics of sniping to aspiring students. The students included women snipers. Major Lyudmila Pavlichenko, considered to be the most successful female sniper w th 309 kills, became a sniper instructor after she was wounded by mortar fire.

ABOVE: Sergeant Mikhail Markovichenko, Sergeant Nikolai Turtsev, and Sergeant Fedor Pekov were considered three of the Soviet Union's best snipers.

LEFT: Sergeant Fedor Pekov demonstrates to his pupil, Vladimir Mikheyev, how to dig in and camouflage himself.

Teaching new snipers varied by location. Inside Stalingrad's Lazur Chemical Plant, instructors stood over their students, instructing them as they fired at helmets, observation slits, and outlines of human torsos – all drawn onto the far wall. In the countryside snipers were trained in open areas where they could learn to d g in and blend with the environment. Captain Zaystev taught "sixes" to his students: covering a large position from three positions with two-man sniper teams.

The training paid off on the battlefront, as unsuspecting enemy soldiers dropped by the hundreds, victims of well-placed shots Zaystev's students alone k l ed 6,000 Germans. The Russians' sk ll with a rifle also had an effect on enemy soldiers not killed. The Germans became afraid to lift their heads in daylight hours.

All photos: National Archives

LEFT: Sergeant Mikhail Markevichenko and his student Nikolai Sofin use a barricade of downed trees as a sniper's nest and keep a sharp eye out for movement to their front.

ABOVE: Sergeant Fedor Pakhov and Vladimir Mikheyev patiently wait for their enemy.

BELOW: Sergeant Fedor Pakhov takes aim at his vantage point while Vladimir Mikheyev uses his binoculars to scan for the enemy. Much of sniping was a question of waiting, sometimes for days.

TOP: An unsuspecting German appears over the ridge, while Sergeant Fedor Pakhov and Vladimir Mikheyev lie in wait. Two Germans eventually appeared over the ridge.

MIDDLE: Vladimir Mikheyev fired first, killing his prey. He would go on to kill 13 Germans.

ABOVE: Sergeant Pakhov fired next, increasing his tally of dead Germans to 244.

Holding the Picket Line

ON MAY 11, 1945, THE DESTROYER USS *HUGH W. HADLEY* SURVIVED A SERIES OF KAMIKAZE ATTACKS OFF OKINAWA BUT WAS SHATTERED IN THE PROCESS.

BY MICHAEL E. HASKEW

ONLY 340 MILES from the home island of Kyushu, the final objective of the American military surge across the Pacific during World War II, short of an invasion of Japan itself, was Okinawa in the Ryukyu archipelago.

On April 1, 1945, an ironically coincidental observance of Easter Sunday and April Fools Day, American troops stormed ashore at Okinawa. The island's capture would provide a staging area for the expected invasion of Japan, the location of airfields from which U.S. planes could operate, and anchorages for American shipping to support the coming final offensive.

The fight for Okinawa was long and bitter—the bloodiest of the war in the Pacific. The island was not declared secure until the end of June, and the land battle cost the Americans more than 39,000 men killed, wounded, and missing. The Japanese suffered horrendous casualties, 110,000 dead and nearly 11,000 captured.

During the 83-day struggle for the island, American Marines and Army troops were dependent on the warships and supply vessels of the U.S. Navy clustered offshore. The naval lifeline enabled the Americans to prosecute a protracted land campaign; however, the longer the ships were anchored or on patrol in the waters off Okinawa the more they were exposed to Japanese air attack, particularly a new and horrific type of assault, a foretaste of which the Americans had experienced in the Philippines and off Iwo Jima during earlier operations—the Kamikaze.

Keenly aware that the Japanese would defend Okinawa fanatically by land, sea, and air, Vice Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner, commander of U.S. amphibious forces in the Pacific, devised a system of early warning against massed Japanese air attacks. Turner ordered the establishment of 16 radar picket stations around Okinawa and along the most likely avenues of approach any attackers would utilize. Turner hoped that the pickets could provide precious additional time to vector fighter aircraft against approaching Japanese planes and allow surface ships to ready their antiaircraft batteries for an effective defense

While the composition of the radar picket stations varied from time to time, they regularly included at least one or two U.S. Navy destroyers, one of which carried fighter direction equipment and personnel whose job was to keep constant watch on radar screens, possibly a destroyer escort, and several smaller support craft. Those destroyers equipped with fighter direction capabilities controlled the combat air patrol (CAP) that was aloft, while the picket ships took Japanese aircraft under fire with the mission of preventing the enemy planes from reaching vulnerable supply vessels off Okinawa or high-value targets such as the aircraft carriers and battleships that were also present.

For the Japanese, the defense of Okinawa required the maximum effort. It was do or die, and a glorious death in battle brought great honor to an individual. Young Japanese men were imbued with the ancient code of Bushido, "the way of the warrior," that dictated honor, loyalty, obedience to superiors, and a willingness to die for the emperor. Closely associated with the samurai warrior class, Bushido exhorted Japanese soldiers, sailors, and airmen to sacrifice themselves in battle if necessary and to never surrender.

As the Americans drew inexorably closer to Japan, hundreds of young men were recruited as suicide pilots who would crash their bomb-laden aircraft into American ships, inflicting as much damage as possible. Named in reference

In this photo taken from the deck of the battleship [illegible] Navy destroyers and other vessels engage Japanese [illegible] bent on crashing into them. This photo was taken on [illegible] the coast of Okinawa, three days after the destroyer USS [illegible] by three Kamikaze and a 550-pound bomb at [illegible]

All photos, National Archives

to the great typhoons that destroyed the Mongol fleets of Kublai Khan bent on invading Japan in 1274 and again in 1281, these pilots were known as Kamikaze, or Divine Wind. Many of them were given only rudimentary flight training, and every available aircraft, some of them long obsolete, was recruited for the defense of Okinawa

By the spring of 1945, the Japanese Fifth Air Fleet, commanded by Vice Admiral Matome Ugaki, prepared to defend Okinawa to the last. The plan was simple. Massed Kamikaze attacks would strike the American fleet off the island and inflict such heavy losses on the invaders that they could not sustain the ground campaign and would be compelled to withdraw. The plan called for as many as 4,500 aircraft to be used in the operation, and the codenames of the general effort and its components belied the terrible nature of the business at hand.

Ten Go, or Heavenly Operation, was to include 10 massed Kamikaze sorties, known as Kikusui, or Floating Chrysanthemums, and each Kikusui might consist of more than 350 planes. These included bombers and fighters, old fixed-gear types, and even a few biplanes.

Also among the aerial suicide weapons hurled at the Americans was a terrifying flying bomb called the Ohka, or Cherry Blossom, packed with more than 2,600 pounds of explosives. An ancestor of the modern cruise missile, the Ohka was slung beneath the fuselage of a bomber, carried within range of the American fleet, and released. The pilot then engaged three solid fuel rockets and streaked toward the target at up to 650 miles per hour, intent on striking the enemy. American sailors and pilots referred to the Ohka as "Baka," Japanese for idiot or fool.

Kamikaze pilots were revered, often partaking in rituals and ceremonies prior to their final missions, toasting one another with saké and donning the traditional hachimaki headband before climbing aboard their aircraft for a rendezvous with destiny. Many wrote last letters to

THE SECOND BATTLE OF BUNKER HILL

On the same day that the destroyers *Hadley* and *Evans* fought their pitched battle off Okinawa, suicide pilots of Kikusui No. 6 claimed a high-value U.S. Navy target, the aircraft carrier *Bunker Hill*, the 36,380-ton Essex-class flagship of Admiral Marc A. Mitscher, operational commander of the American Fast Carrier Task Force.

The *Bunker Hill*'s planes had participated in air raids against Japanese surface warships, including the super battleship *Yamato*, which had been sent on its own naval suicide mission but was overwhelmed and sunk. Steaming 76 miles east of Okinawa on the morning of May 11, 1945, the carrier had been off the coast of the embattled island for 58 days, and intense Kamikaze attacks were commonplace.

Two Japanese pilots, Lieutenant (j.g.) Yasunori Seizo and 22-year-old Ensign Kiyoshi Ogawa were flying Mitsubishi A6M Zero fighters carrying 550-pound bombs. At approximately 10 AM, the Kamikaze pilots spotted the *Bunker Hill* and slipped past combat air patrol fighters. When they were sighted, the planes were already initiating their fatal dives against the carrier.

Seizo released his bomb, which smashed through the flight deck and exited the other side of the ship, exploding in midair. His Zero then careened into 34 armed and fueled aircraft sitting on the *Bunker Hill*'s flight deck and slid over the side. Every one of the American planes erupted in flames, creating a catastrophic inferno. At 10:05 AM, Ogawa screamed toward the bridge of the carrier in a near vertical dive. He released his bomb and followed it into the flight deck near the carrier's island.

The *Bunker Hill* blazed from stem to stern. Mitscher barely escaped the inferno with his life, but half his staff was killed. Ogawa's bomb detonated on the hangar deck, and gasoline fires raged. A number of *Bunker Hill* pilots were killed in their cockpits. Thirty others were caught in the ready room and died after rushing into a nearby corridor, where the flames had consumed all available oxygen.

Heroic damage control efforts saved the carrier, and the *Bunker Hill* made the 7,000-mile voyage to the Puget Sound Navy Yard in Washington under her own power. The damage was so extensive that the carrier was out of action for the remainder of the war. A total of 373 of her complement were killed, 264 wounded, and 43 missing.

Two of the most poignant photographs of the war depict the bodies of the American pilots lying

family or friends and left behind locks of hair, fingernails, or even a severed little finger for enshrinement.

"Keep in good health. I believe in the victory of greater Asia. I pray for the happiness of you all, and I beg your forgiveness for my lack of piety," Kamikaze pilot Akio Otsuka wrote to friends. "I leave for the attack with a smile on my face. The moon will be full tonight. As I fly over the open sea off Okinawa, I will choose the enemy ship that is to be my target. I will show you that I know how to die bravely. With all my respectful affection...."

Ugaki marshaled both Army and Navy aircraft, most of them gathered at airfields in southern Kyushu. When the Americans landed at Okinawa on April 1, he was unable to immediately respond en masse. Although a few sorties were undertaken, American bombing and shortages of fuel and other supplies delayed Kikusui No. 1 until April 6. From that date, the fury of the Kamikaze was relentlessly visited upon the Americans, who struggled to comprehend the reality that men hoping to stay alive were defending themselves against an enemy whose intent was just the opposite—to die and cause as much damage as possible.

During the course of the Okinawa campaign, nearly 1,500 Japanese suicide pilots died attacking American ships. Twenty-nine U.S. Navy vessels were sunk and 120 damaged, while 3,048 men were killed and 6,035 wounded. The constant strain on the American sailors took its toll, psychologically and physically. After enduring a particularly vicious Kamikaze attack, one sailor simply stood up at his gun mount, declared, "It's hot today!" and jumped over the side of his ship, never to be seen again.

ABOVE: The Fletcher-class destroyer USS *Evans* was on station with the *Hadley* on May 11, 1945, and was seriously damaged by Japanese Kamikaze planes. OPPOSITE: This February 1945 photograph of the Sumner-class destroyer USS *Hadley* shows the destroyer three months before its fateful rendezvous with swarms of Japanese Kamikaze aircraft off Okinawa. The destroyer's combat career comprised less than two years of service.

Although some major warships were struck by Kamikazes off Okinawa, including several carriers and battleships, overeager suicide pilots often attempted to crash into the first American warship they sighted, and the destroyers and other patrol craft of the picket line absorbed the devastating brunt of Operation Ten Go. The heroism of the sailors aboard these small warships was spectacular. They fought desperately and held the line, writing one of the most

The aircraft carrier USS *Bunker Hill* blazes after being struck by two Kamikaze suicide planes off the coast of Okinawa on May 11, 1945, the same day that the gallant destroyer USS *Hadley* was hit.

twisted atop one another in the corridor where they were asphyxiated and the bodies of *Bunker Hill* sailors still clutching a firehose they were using to battle the blaze on the hangar deck when they were overcome by smoke and fumes.

Ogawa's body was also discovered in his cockpit on the hangar deck of the *Bunker Hill*. His plane had not been destroyed in the crash. In 2001, more than 50 years after the young Kamikaze pilot's death, some of his personal effects, recovered by U.S. sailors, were returned to members of his family.

One of the items recovered was Ogawa's last letter to his parents. He had written, "I will make a sortie, flying over those calm clouds in a peaceful emotion. I can think about neither life nor death. A man should die once, and no day is more honorable than today to dedicate myself for the eternal cause.... I will go to the front smiling. On the day of the sortie too, and forever."

The tragedy of war came into sharp focus for young men and their families, both American and Japanese, during the climactic battle of World War II in the Pacific.

stirring chapters in the history of naval warfare in the process.

While the stories of courage on the picket line are numerous, the ordeal of the Sumner-class destroyer USS *Hugh W. Hadley* is exceptional and highly indicative of the savage fight that took place off the shores of Okinawa. The *Hadley*'s brief and violent career reached its zenith on the morning of May 11, 1945, at Radar Picket Station 15, in the East China Sea, 60 miles north of Point Bolo, on the east coast of Okinawa

Named for a U.S. Navy officer killed in action in the Solomons in August 1942, the 2,200-ton *Hadley* was built in the Bethlehem Steel Company shipyards at Terminal Island, California. Her keel was laid in February 1944, she was launched five months later, and she was commissioned in November 1944 under Commander L.C. Chamberlain. The *Hadley* was 376 feet, six inches long with a beam of 40 feet, 10 inches, and was powered by four boilers providing 60,000 horsepower to drive turbines turning twin propeller shafts.

Armed to the proverbial teeth, the *Hadley*'s weaponry included six 5-inch guns double mounted in three turrets, 12 40mm Bofors and 11 20mm Oerlikon antiaircraft guns, 10 21-inch torpedo tubes, six depth-charge projectors, and a pair of depth-charge tracks. The ship's complement numbered 336 officers and sailors.

On January 13, 1945, Commander Baron J. Mullaney took charge aboard the *Hadley*, and at the end of February the brand new destroyer sailed to Pearl Harbor. On March 7, the *Hadley* departed for Ulithi along with the escort carrier USS *Santee*. On the 25th, the destroyer got underway for Okinawa along with a host of transports, most of them LSTs (Landing Ship, Tank) carrying men and equipment for the upcoming invasion.

By the evening of March 31, the small islands surrounding Okinawa came into view. The *Hadley*'s guns fired in anger for the first time, shooting down a Japanese Mitsubishi G4M Betty bomber, one of several aircraft that had been shadowing and harassing the American ships. The following morning, the Okinawa landings took place, and the *Hadley* was then assigned to antisubmarine duty. An escort mission to Saipan was completed by mid-April, and the destroyer was back on antisubmarine patrol off Okinawa by the 27th.

The following day, the *Hadley* was ordered to radar picket duty along with the destroyer *R.H. Smith*. A Marine Vought F4U Corsair fighter plane was forced to ditch when its engine failed, and *Hadley* crewmen plucked the pilot from the Pacific. Tense hours were spent at general quarters due to the continuing threat of Kamikaze raids. Word reached the crew that the destroyer *Aaron Ward*, the warship that had preceded the *Hadley* in construction at the Terminal Island shipyards, had been crippled and was nearly sunk by six Kamikaze hits while on picket duty south of the *Hadley*'s position.

As the sun climbed into the sky on May 4, smoke billowed from the destroyer *Shea*, struck by an Ohka just 1,000 yards off *Hadley*'s port quarter. Without fighter direction equipment, the *Hadley* took control of the nearby combat air patrol as best it could until relieved a couple of hours later. Following a brief stop at the anchorage of Kerama Retto, southwest of Okinawa, the *Hadley* patrolled off Hagushi Bay, a primary supply point near the mouth of the Bishi River on Okinawa and the intersection of the zones of the 1st and 6th Marine Divisions to the north and the U.S. Army's 7th and 96th Divisions to the south.

On May 7, the *Hadley* came alongside the destroyer *Brown*, another of the few picket destroyers that had come through the gauntlet of Kamikaze attacks unscathed to date. Fighter direction equipment was transferred to the *Hadley*, and by the afternoon of May 10 the destroyer was in position on Radar Picket Station 15. Along with the *Hadley* were the Fletcher-class destroyer USS *Evans*, under Commander R.J. Archer, *LCS 82* (Landing Craft, Support), *LCS(L) 83* and *LCS(L) 84* (Landing Craft Support, Large), and *LSM(R) 193* (Landing Ship, Medium, Rocket). With grim humor, American sailors had begun referring to the smaller ships that accompanied the destroyers on the picket line as "pallbearers."

An uneasy calm settled around Radar Picket Station 15 on the morning of May 11, 1945, but everyone in the small clutch of ships knew that the Kamikaze storm would inevitably break. At 6:36 AM, the combat air patrol of 12 Corsair fighters accounted for a single Japanese plane, and then at 7:45, the *Hadley*'s first direct contact of the day, a Japanese floatplane, was sighted.

"As I started to eat breakfast, the familiar GONG, GONG, GONG of the GQ bell sounded—again with the expected announcement, 'General Quarters, General Quarters.' But this announcement was different, however, as it was followed, breathlessly, by the words, 'Commence Firing, Commence Firing, starboard side!'" remembered Doug Aitken, a young officer aboard the *Hadley* who years later retired from the Navy with the rank of captain.

ABOVE: Photographed shortly after the war, this Japanese Ohka flying bomb was intended for the defense of the Home Islands. American sailors dreaded these manned suicide aircraft and referred to them as 'Baka,' Japanese for idiot or fool. TOP: Vice Admiral Matome Ugaki commanded the Japanese Fifth Air Fleet and launched waves of Kamikaze aircraft against the U.S. Navy ships supporting the Okinawa landings. OPPOSITE: This famous photo depicts the moment of impact as a Japanese Kamikaze hits the hull of the battleship USS *Missouri* as sailors continue to service their antiaircraft weapons. The A6M2 Zero fighter glanced off the battleship and crashed into the sea moments after the photo was taken.

"The intruder which called us to General Quarters was a single aircraft, a Japanese floatplane flying very low on the water directly at us," Aitken continued. "It had escaped detection by both air and surface search radars, and also the Combat Air Patrol (CAP) of high flying Marine F4U Corsairs which we directed from our ship. Fortunately, we were alert, and our gunners shot it down close aboard. Everyone became intensely alert as we remained at GQ wondering what was next. All was quiet again for a few minutes. Then they came."

Commander Mullaney later reported that the aircraft was "taken under fire by both ships (*Hadley* and *Evans*). Soon, this plane headed away from the *Evans* and came directly for the *Hadley* which was about one and a half miles from the *Evans*. This plane was shot down by the *Hadley* at the range of 1,200 yards."

The single Japanese aircraft was a harbinger of the hell to come, the herald of more than 150 enemy planes, including Kamikazes, their fighter escort, conventional bombers, and the dreaded Ohkas that comprised Kikusui No. 6. For the next two hours, the seamen at Radar Picket Station 15 fought for their lives against overwhelming odds. The dozen Corsairs of the combat air patrol gamely engaged the swarms of Japanese planes, and with additional fighters that subsequently arrived, accounted for about 40 of the enemy. However, it was simply impossible to shoot them all down.

Within minutes of the first encounter, Mullaney and his officers on the bridge of the *Hadley* were shocked at what they saw. "At about 0755 numerous enemy planes were contacted by our instruments as coming towards the ship (and Okinawa) from the north, distance about 55 miles," he wrote in his after action report. "One division of CAP was ordered out to intercept. Shortly thereafter, several enemy formations were detected, and the entire CAP was ordered out to intercept. Our Fighter Director Officer in CIC (combat information center) had estimated the total number of enemy planes as 156 coming in at different heights in groups as follows: Raid ONE 36, Raid TWO 50, Raid THREE 20, Raid FOUR 20 to 30, Raid FIVE 20, Total 156 planes.

"Shortly we received reports from them [CAP] that they had destroyed twelve planes," Mullaney continued. "Then they were so busy that they could not send us reports but we intercepted their communications to learn about 40 to 50 planes were destroyed by them. CIC reported that there were no friendly planes within ten miles of this ship."

Japanese suicide attacks against the *Hadley* and the Evans were unceasing. Attacking singly or in groups of four or more, the Kamikazes pressed their suicide runs, and the tiny ships worked in mutual support as best they could. The destroyers became separated by as much as two to three miles as they maneuvered, but they strained to concentrate their fire

"WHO CAN MEASURE THE DEGREE OF COURAGE OF MEN, WHO STAND UP TO THEIR GUNS IN THE FACE OF DIVING PLANES THAT DESTROY THEM? WHO CAN MEASURE THE LOYALTY OF A CREW WHO RISKED DEATH THE SAVE THE SHIP FROM SINKING WHEN ALL SEEMED LOST?"

The *Hadley* heeled to bring as many guns as possible to bear on a Japanese Aichi D3A Val dive bomber, screaming downward. The attacker's speed and violent maneuvering made it virtually impossible for the destroyer's gunners to assess the range to their rapidly closing target. At about 5,000 yards the 5-inch guns barked, then the staccato of the 40mm mounts joined in, and at 2,000 yards the chatter of the 20mm cannon could be heard. A thin ribbon of smoke began to trail from the stricken Kamikaze, but still it came on. Seconds later, dark smoke and flame erupted and a wing was torn from the Val. The shredded plane nosed up and plunged into the sea a mere 100 yards away

Swarms of Japanese planes seemed to fill the sky, and the Corsair pilots of the combat air patrol shot them down until their .50-caliber machine guns had no more ammunition. Still, the Marine pilots pursued the enemy planes, feigning attacks and even causing some Japanese aircraft into such violent maneuvering that their inexperienced pilots lost control and plunged into the Pacific.

"Obviously, the Marines could not stop them

ABOVE: The intensity of U.S. naval gunfire is visible in this photo as 20mm shells splash into the sea behind a Kate torpedo plane bearing down on the battleship USS *Texas*. The Kamikaze missed its target and crashed into the Pacific. OPPOSITE: The Fletcher-class destroyer USS *Newcomb* was struck by five Kamikazes during a 90-minute ordeal off Okinawa. This photograph reveals the extent of the damage the ship sustained. Remarkably, the destroyer remained afloat despite the destruction.

all," wrote Lieutenant (j.g.) Thomas Dwyer of the *Hadley*, "and many broke through, circling the two destroyers like the Indians around the wagon train. From time to time, the Japanese would launch crudely coordinated attacks . against the embattled ships."

During the opening minutes of the fight, the *Hadley*'s gunners flamed four Japanese planes that were attempting to slip through Radar Picket Station 15 and move on toward the invasion fleet closer to Okinawa's shoreline. Kamikazes attacked the *Hadley* in steep dives of 45 degrees or more, and during the frantic half hour between 8:30 and 9 AM, the *Hadley*'s gunners accounted for a dozen enemy aircraft. The *Evans* was assailed from virtually all points of the compass, blazing away and downing a total of 15 planes in the running duel and assisting in destroying another four.

Both little warships steered in circles, their rudders hard over to bring every available gun to bear, and churned the water at 27 knots. At 8:35 AM, the *Hadley*'s rudder went hard over to avoid a Kamikaze dive bomber that was careening downward and only 1,000 feet above the ship. The destroyer swung away from the pilot's aiming point, and he splashed a scant 20 feet from the *Hadley*'s stern. At 9 AM, the two ships were three miles apart, too distant to lend mutual aid and firepower. In a flash, disaster struck the *Evans*

Lieutenant James M. Smith, ship's doctor aboard the *Evans*, remembered a "whirlwind of planes coming at us from every direction. Guns were firing so rapidly that reliefs had to be afforded to exhausted loaders. The ship was surrounded with smoke from our own fire, and it was difficult to spot the Japs because of the black shell bursts that mingled with them.'

"After one hour, 13 minutes of splashing all attacking planes," Smith continued, "a Kamikaze artist maneuvered through the barrage and winged over on the port bow. A hole at the waterline resulting from this hit flooded one living compartment. In quick succession, hits two, three, and four occurred. The second and third resulted in critical damage to the *Evans*. An Oscar [Japanese Army Nakajima Ki-43 fighter] struck at the waterline on the port side. The flaming plane hurtled onto the fantail. Its bomb exploded under the after engineering spaces, flooding them immediately."

The *Evans* lost all power and went dead in the water. Her executive officer was blown over the ship's side, and an alert seaman jumped in to rescue him. Outstanding work by damage control parties kept the *Evans* from sinking, but the ship was out of the fight. In the afternoon, the stricken destroyer was taken in tow by the fleet tug USS *Cree* and reached temporary drydock at Kerama Retto. After makeshift repairs, the *Evans* was towed to Saipan, Pearl Harbor, and then Mare Island Navy Yard in San Francisco. Thirty-two members of the *Evans*' crew were killed in action on May 11, and 27 wounded—but the indomitable ship survived.

The *Hadley* fought on. Her tiny consorts did their best in support. Gunners aboard *LSM(R) 193* fired their single 5-inch gun as rapidly as possible. With each discharge, the recoil shook the small vessel like a rag doll. Corsairs swooped and jigged, braving the friendly fire from below to ward off the Kamikazes. The *Hadley* put up a wall of steel.

Shortly after the *Evans* was hit, an overwhelming attack finally penetrated the defenses and literally mauled the gallant *Hadley*. Lookouts spotted 10 Kamikazes closing on the destroyer.

Commander Mullaney reported later, "For 20 minutes, the *Hadley* fought off the enemy singlehanded being separated from the *Evans*, which was out of action, by three miles and the four small support ships by two miles. Finally, at 0920, ten which had surrounded the *Hadley*, four on the starboard bow under fire by the main battery and machine guns, four on the port bow under fire by the forward machine guns, and two astern under fire by the aft machine guns, attacked the ship simultaneously. All ten planes were destroyed in a remarkable fight and each plane was definitely accounted for..."

The *Hadley*, however, was grievously wounded. Eyewitness accounts vary; however, it is generally accepted that in approximately four minutes of furious action the destroyer was hit by three Kamikazes and a single 550-pound bomb.

Dwyer remembered, "*Hadley* took her first Kamikaze hit on the after port quad 40mm mount (Mount 44). Mount Captain Nicholas's last words were, 'We'll get the S.O.B.' as the aircraft dove right down the barrels of the gun mount, killing the gun crew on the spot. Almost simultaneously several bombs penetrated the ship and detonated under the keel, lifting the ship out of the water. Shortly thereafter, another aircraft struck the starboard side amidships at the waterline. The fuselage pierced the hull and caused heavy loss of life and severe flooding in the engine and fire rooms. Yet another Kamikaze dove on the ship and passed between the foremast and the after stack, clipping some wires as it fell harmlessly into the sea."

Aitken remembered, "USS *Hadley* suffered three hits: one was not serious; the second and third proved fatal. The second, at the waterline, opened up virtually all engineering spaces to the sea. A 550 lb. bomb carried by that Kamikaze exploded directly under the ship humping the bottom nearly five feet as would a depth charge explosion. Moments later, the third Kamikaze crashed the after deck house quad 40mm gun area with disastrous results."

A third account asserts that the initial Kamikaze to strike the *Hadley* was an Ohka, released by a Japanese bomber at 9:05 AM, followed by a crash on the aft deck that destroyed several guns, and the last Kamikaze hit at the waterline.

Commander Mullaney's report stated bluntly, "As a result of this attack, the *Hadley* was: (1) Hit by a bomb aft (2) By a BAKA seen to be released from a low flying BETTY (3) Was struck by a suicide plane aft (4) Hit by a suicide plane in rigging."

The damage was devastating. The destroyer billowed smoke and flame. Scores of sailors were dead or wounded. Yet another Kamikaze came screaming down at the *Hadley*, but the few guns still operational sent it crashing into the ocean. Then, there were no more. The Kikusui had dissipated as rapidly as it appeared.

Now, Commander Mullaney and his crew were desperately trying to keep their stricken ship afloat. The *Hadley* listed to starboard, her fantail was awash, and the ship went dead in the water. It appeared that she could capsize at any moment. Explosive Torpex dripped from the warheads of rapidly heating torpedoes that threatened to cook off and blow the ship to pieces

Mullaney ordered nearby crewmen to hoist all U.S. flags and any other colors available up the halyards, shouting, "If this ship is going down, she's going with all flags flying."

The captain later reported, "The ship was badly holed and immediately both engine rooms and one fireroom were flooded and the ship settled down and listed rapidly. All five-inch guns were out of action, a fire was raging aft of number two stack, ammunition was exploding, and the entire ship was engulfed in a thick black smoke which forced the crew to seek safety, some by jumping over the side, others by crowding forward and awaiting orders. The ship was helpless to defend herself and at this time the situation appeared hopeless. The Commanding Officer received reports from the Chief Engineer and the Damage Control Officer which indicated that the main spaces were flooded...."

"The engineers were securing the forward boilers to prevent them from blowing up," Mullaney continued. "The order to 'prepare to abandon Ship' was given and life rafts and floats were put over the side. A party of about fifty men and officers were being organized to make a last fight to save the ship and the remainder of the crew and the wounded were put over into the water."

As those in the water were picked up by other vessels, the drama of the 50 bold men aboard the *Hadley* unfolded. Torpedoes and unexploded ammunition were rolled and thrown over the side. Hoses were played on the flames for 15 minutes. Weight was shifted from starboard to port to help counteract the list. The fire was brought under control, and the flooding stopped. A single fireroom bulkhead held.

The fast transport USS *Barber*, auxiliary fleet tug *ATR-114*, and destroyer USS *Wadsworth* came up to render assistance, the *Wadsworth*'s lookouts searching the sky for any renewed Japanese threat. While *LCS 82* and *LCS(L) 84* had their hands full with the heavily damaged *Evans*, *LSM(R) 193* and *LCS(L) 83* began towing the *Hadley* about noon to the nearest relative safety, the temporary anchorage at Ie Shima, a small island northwest of Okinawa.

Credited with shooting down 23 Japanese planes during the May 11 fight on the picket line, the USS *Hadley* established a U.S. Navy record for enemy aircraft destroyed in a single engagement. Her guns fired 801 rounds of 5-inch ammunition, 8,950 rounds of 40mm, 5,990 rounds of 20mm, and 801 charges of smokeless gunpowder. Miraculously, the *Hadley* had survived her epic struggle. Twenty-eight of her crew were killed in action. Two more died of their injuries later, and 68 were wounded.

Later, the battle-blackened destroyer was towed to Kerama Retto and entered floating drydock ARD 28 for temporary repairs. Sailors from the repair ship USS *Zaniah* went to work. In July, steel I-beams were welded to the interior of the hull to hold the shattered destroyer together, and the exterior of the hull was patched with steel plating. From there, the *Hadley* was towed to Buckner Bay, the main

Continued on page 78

By Christopher Miskimon

National Archives

Battle for the North Atlantic

Halting the U-boat threat to the Atlantic sealanes contributed to the Allied victory over Germany.

VICTORY IN EUROPE DURING WORLD WAR II IS OFTEN ATTRIBUTED TO VARIOUS exertions, turning points, and campaigns that spanned several theaters of war. All played their part in achieving final victory, and opinions vary as to how important most of these events were in the grand scheme. A few are undisputedly vital links in the Allied victory over Nazi Germany. The years-long struggle in the frigid waters of the Atlantic Ocean is one of those supremely substantial efforts from which ultimate triumph flowed. Without control of the sealanes between the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union, Germany could not have been defeated as quickly and finally as it was.

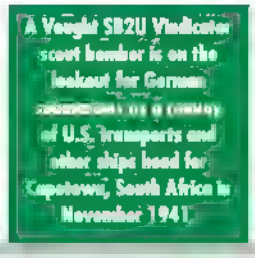
A new coffee table book gives the history of this war at sea. *Battle for the North Atlantic: The Strategic Naval Campaign That Won the War in Europe* (John R. Bruning, Zenith Press, Minneapolis, 2013, 300 pp., maps, photographs, index, $40.00, hardcover) is far from the first book to cover this topic, but is a thoroughly enjoyable work that highlights the major events of the Battle of the Atlantic while also covering details of daily life at sea and the constant efforts by each side to attain dominance over the other.

The text of the book is well researched and diverse, covering the numerous aspects of the campaign. The author explains how prewar budgets and shipbuilding programs defined the fleets at the war's beginning and how wartime planning and construction had to make up for a lack of Allied foresight in terms of convoy escorts and antisubmarine capability. Intelligence efforts played a large part in the eventual Allied success as British codebreakers deciphered German message traffic and had to play the knife's-edge game of using the information without revealing its source.

Though there were a few exchanges between capital ships in the Atlantic, the majority of the war was fought by submarines, merchantmen, escorts, and aircraft carriers. Improved sonar and antisubmarine weapons such as the hedgehog spigot mortar fitted to the escorts vastly increased their effectiveness against U-boats. Meanwhile, the Germans steadily improved their own submarines to combat Allied countermeasures. It was a struggle the Germans eventually lost, but not until U-boat crews nearly brought Britain to its knees. Casualties were high on both sides, and the U-boat crews suffered about 75 percent casualties over the course of the war.

While ship versus ship battles and fights against the submarine threat were no doubt important, really the war-winning weapon in the Battle of the Atlantic was the aircraft. Even the Germans had some success with Luftwaffe antishipping strikes early in the war. Planes such as the Focke Wulf Fw-200 Condor were used briefly to great effect until the British got enough fighters in the air to counter them. Afterward, the air war over the ocean was an Allied effort. Long-range patrol planes eventually squeezed the air gap in the mid-Atlantic tighter until the appearance of sufficient numbers of escort carriers closed it for good. The airplane's ability to search large areas of ocean and then quickly bring firepower to bear on a U-boat combined with the explosion in escort ship production to make successful U-boat patrols an increasing rarity from mid-1943 on.

While this book's text is good, its illustrations and photographs shine. The layout is well designed and the photos themselves well chosen. Using pictures from both sides of the conflict and mating them to the text, the reader can view the major personalities, see ships and planes in action, and appreciate sad images of sinking merchant vessels, the smoking twisted wreckage of warships, and the outlines of the various aircraft that fought in the skies over the Atlantic. Maps are included where relevant, and the overall aesthetic of the book is pleasing to the eye and makes one want to turn each page.



A Vought SB2U Vindicator scout bomber is on the lookout for German submarines on a convoy of U.S. transports and other ships bound for Capetown, South Africa in November 1941.

Intrepid Aviators: The American Flyers Who Sank Japan's Greatest Battleship (Gregory G. Fletcher, NAL Caliber, New York, 2013, 420 pp., maps, photographs, notes, appendices, index, $16.00, softcover)

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May 31-June 13, 2014
September 19-October 1, 2014

70th Anniversary of D-Day Operation Overlord
June 1-10, 2014
September 19-27, 2014

70th Anniversary of D-Day In the Footsteps of Patton
June 2-15, 2014

Lewis & Clark: Corps of Discovery
June 19-29, 2014

WWII in Poland & Germany 70th Anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising
August 30-September 13, 2014

Italian Campaign
October 2014

Civil War
November 1-8, 2014

Naval aviation is a world unto itself, requiring unique sets of skills and knowledge. During World War II carrier pilots were often men as young as 20 with a sprinkling of older pilots often in leadership positions. This brought challenges to making an aircraft carrier's air group an effective weapon. Forming and training the group was a long, arduous process. New pilots had to learn how to navigate over open ocean, take off and land on a moving, rolling flight deck, and coordinate fighter, dive bomber, and torpedo attacks. This book tells the story of Air Group 18 aboard the aircraft carrier USS *Intrepid*.

Wartime air groups underwent extensive training long before they went aboard a carrier. Once aboard *Intrepid*, Air Group 18 continued training even as the ship cruised into Pacific waters. The first combat missions were relatively easy, designed to blood the new pilots. As time went on the missions became more difficult; the pilots gained experience even as they began to take losses. The height of Group 18's war was the attack on the Japanese super battleship *Musashi* in the Sibuyan Sea on October 24, 1944. Repeated strikes against the ship by multiple aircraft sent the leviathan to the bottom after at least 15 bomb and 10 torpedo hits

While covering the entire air group in general, the focus of the book is on VT-18, *Intrepid*'s torpedo bomber squadron. In its first strike against *Musashi*, two of the squadron's Grumman TBF Avenger torpedo bombers were shot down. Of the six airmen, only a single pilot survived. He had to dodge a Japanese destroyer and swim miles to a nearby island, his survival plagued by hunger and dehydration. Eventually, he joined a group of Filipino guerrillas and fought the Japanese until liberation months later. Torpedo bombers were the most vulnerable of an air group's planes due to their heavy payloads and the relatively low and approach required for a successful torpedo attack.

For readers interested in naval aviation or the Pacific War, this well-researched book is a trove of detailed information. The author extensively describes the actions needed for takeoffs, landings, attack runs, and air combat in minute detail. A carrier pilot himself, the author brings that experience to the book in relating a pilot's life aboard ship and in the air. These small details are used to weave a coherent and flowing narrative for Air Group 18 throughout the war.

Stalin's Claws: From the Purges to the Winter War (E.R. Hooten, Tattered Flag Press, West Sussex, UK, 2013, photographs, notes, appendices, index, $39.95, hardcover).

The actions of the Red Army prior to Operation Barbarossa are usually summed up in its

Winter War against Finland in 1940-1941. However fascinating that conflict remains, it is just part of the story. From the beginning of the purges to the German invasion, the Soviet Union used its army in many operations along its borders. *Stalin's Claws* explains these numerous actions along with the political processes behind them in detail.

The author begins with an overview of the purges. This veritable assault upon the Soviet officer corps decimated its ranks and instilled a survival mentality in most of those left. This witch hunt against perceived enemies of the state went to depths of paranoia that boggle the mind even today. Some who sat in judgment knew they would be next. Many were shot, others imprisoned, with only a handful being reinstated after the June 1941 invasion by the Nazis.

The Soviet Union found itself embroiled in combat while the purges continued in 1938-1939. A series of border conflicts with Japan ended in victory at the Battle of Khalkin Gol. When Stalin agreed to a nonaggression pact with Hitler, it spelled out the partition and doom of Poland. Yet the Soviet attack and occupation of that nation was only one step. The Baltic States were next, forced to concede to occupation. Later Bessarabia and Bukovina would follow.

By far the largest of these conflicts was the Winter War with Finland, and it is well documented here. The Red Army was initially stymied by the smaller Finnish military, given a bloody nose and a rude awakening. The effects of the purges were still evident. As they would later do against the Nazis, however, the Soviets rallied their vast resources and pushed on to a victory over the Finns, which had repercussions later in World War II. Finally, the Soviet Union was triumphant for a short period until Operation Barbarossa

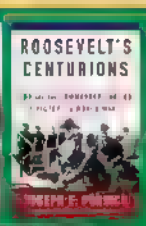
This book is long on detail, and complete orders of battle for each operation are in the appendices. The details of each action tend to be broad brush strokes, but this is typical of works covering the vast scopes of the Red Army's activities. Readers interested in the Soviet Union and Red Army will find this work of interest.

Beyond the Call of Duty: Army Flight Nursing in World War II (Judith Barger, Kent State University Press, Kent, 2013, 285 pp., maps, photographs, notes index, $28.95, hardcover).

During World War II, over one million American casualties were evacuated via aircraft. For some theaters of war it was a necessity; the jungles of New Guinea and Burma or the frozen wastes of Alaska made ground evacuation difficult to impossible. Even in the relatively built

New and Noteworthy

Rendezvous with Destiny: How Franklin D. Roosevelt and Five Extraordinary Men Took America into the War and Into the World (Michael Fullilove, Penguin, 2013, 480 pp., $29.95, hardcover). Five men worked for and influenced President Franklin D. Roosevelt in the critical years 1939-1941: "Wild" Bill Donovan, Sumner Welles, Harry Hopkins, Wendell Willkie and Averell Harriman. Their work was critical to his effort to carry America through the war.



The Love-charm of Bombs; Restless Lives in the Second World War (Lara Feigel, Bloomsbury Press, 2013, 319 pp., $35.00, hardcover). This book records glimpses of the London Blitz from the view of five prominent literary authors of the time. Some worked as volunteers for the war effort, but all kept diaries and wrote extensive correspondence. These writings are woven together into a tale of the times.

Cronkite's War: His World War II Letters Home (Walter Cronkite IV and Maurice Isserman, National Geographic, 2013, 318 pp., $28.00, hardcover). This is a compilation of the famous journalist's letters, written to various associates, with text added to fill in the story of Cronkite's wartime experiences.

Roosevelt's Centurions; FDR and the Commanders He Led to Victory in World War II (Joseph E. Persico, Random House, 2013, 650 pp., $35.00, hardcover). During World War II President Franklin D. Roosevelt rode herd on a number of military leaders, guiding them toward ultimate victory. Major figures from George C. Marshall to Joseph Stilwell figure prominently in the story of how FDR led this group and the nation to victory.

Tomorrow You Die; The Astonishing Survival Story of a Second World War Pilot

up terrain of Europe, aerial evacuation was used to take wounded soldiers back to the United States for treatment. On those flights was a new and relatively unknown boon to the injured and sick, a U.S. Army flight nurse.

Before the war, commercial airlines hired only registered nurses to be flight attendants. One U.S. officer put it plainly, stating, "We felt that if ... a group of healthy individuals could fly around in commercial airlines having a nurse attend them, our wounded were certainly entitled to the same consideration."

Readers interested in the story of these flight nurses can now learn their tale. The first such nurses began their story in the 1930s through the budding aviation industry and affiliation with the Red Cross. Once the war began, these nurses lobbied to be allowed to use their skills in the Army Air Corps. At first, however, the military told them they could guarantee flight status to any who volunteered, though previous experience would be taken into consideration. Eventually, a school for flight nursing was established to train the volunteers to a uniform standard.

After training, the newly minted flight nurses were sent to do their jobs but still had to fight through some institutional roadblocks. For example, the initial nurse's uniform included a skirt and heels, not very practical in an aircraft where the nurses had to wear parachutes with straps that went between the legs for fastening. A practical demonstration, complete with stalled engines, was needed to prove the point and get the women pants. The first nurses to serve in a

combat theater went to North Africa. From there they went on to serve in every theater, caring for patients and saving lives. Their hard work and success paved the way for postwar flight nurse programs that continue to this day as a proven asset of the military medical services.

This book is easy to read and is clearly written from a hand of experience (the author was a career USAF nurse). While the general story of the flight nurses is covered in detail, space is set aside for some of the unusual tales, such as nurses who were prisoners of war or were downed behind enemy lines and how they met the particular challenges of their situation. One chapter covers how flight nurses were viewed in the contemporary media and by their fellow service members.

Wavell in the Middle East, 1939-1941: A Study in Generalship (Harold E. Raugh, Jr. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 2013, 323 pp., maps, photographs, notes index, $24.95, paperbound).

When the subject of British World War II generals arises, most Americans think of Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery first, with perhaps a few thoughts going to William Slim, Claude Auchinleck, or Harold "Jumbo" Wilson. A man they should think of is Field Marshal Archibald Wavell. While circumstances denied him the

oner of the Japanese (Andy Coogan, Mainstream Publishing, 2013, 255 pp., $16.95, softcover). Captured at the fall of Singapore, Andy Coogan spent three years as a prisoner of the Japanese. His journey took him through Taiwan and Japan to Nagasaki.

Freedom's Forge: How American Business Produced Victory in World War II (Arthur Herman, Random House, 2013, 413 pp., $18.00, softcover). Two businessmen, William Knudsen and Henry J. Kaiser, were instrumental in mobilizing the U.S. industrial base for war production. Their efforts turned the nation into the arsenal of democracy.

Battle Colors, Volume V (Robert A. Watkins, Schiffer Publishing, 2013, 152 pp., $45.00, hardcover). Part of Schiffer's series on the insignia and markings used by the U.S. Army Air Corps, this volume focuses on the Pacific Theater. It has Schiffer's usual thoroughness and attention to detail.

Images of War Special: Tiger I and Tiger II (Anthony Tucker-Jones, Pen and Sword, 2013, 176 pp., $24.95, softcover). This is a photo book concentrating on Germany's Tiger tank series. The author compares the myths that have grown around them to the reality of their service.

Mussolini's Navy: A Reference Guide to the Regia Marina, 1930-1945 (Maurizio Brescia, Naval Institute Press, 2012, 256 pp., $72.95, hardcover). This is a guidebook to the Italian Navy of World War II. This reference work covers the topic in greater detail than any other English language work available.

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fame gained by others, Wavell held the line during some of the darkest days of the British Empire in the early years of World War II. A textbook example of the "quiet professional," he led Commonwealth forces through a series of campaigns in the Middle East, many of them simultaneously, with forces that were often outnumbered and ill equipped for the tasks assigned them. Nevertheless, his troops were able to attain victory most of the time and protect the Empire's vital oil-producing and transportation links.

This book studies Wavell during the time of his greatest challenge. In 1939, he was placed in command of British forces in the Middle East, an area ranging from the Western Desert of Egypt east to Iraq and the Persian Gulf and south to the Sudan and Aden. After the war began, this area was expanded to include Greece and Turkey, as well as Libya, parts of Algeria, and portions of Africa as far south as Rhodesia. The Italians and later Germans were active in North Africa, Ethiopia, and Syria, even working in Iraq to support an uprising there in the spring of 1941.

Wavell's forces had to contend with all this despite shortages of troops and equipment. Britain, reeling under the Blitz and threatened by invasion, could send only limited aid. For example, Italian troop strength in Libya was over 150,000 versus some 36,000 British when Mussolini's forces invaded Egypt in the autumn of 1940. Despite this, Wavell's Operation Compass knocked the Italians out of Egypt and halfway across Libya, inflicting a loss of over 100,000 prisoners. His shoestring operations were strained further by the requirement to support operations in Greece, fight in East Africa, and suppress the Iraqi uprising.

The invasion of Vichy French-held Syria and the defense of Crete after the defeat in Greece were further stresses. Through all this Wavell and his soldiers were on occasion able to achieve outright victory or at least stave off defeat. Unfortunately, holding the line against long odds was not the same as victory, and Churchill eventually replaced Wavell with a series of successors who found the job every bit as difficult despite Wavell having taken Syria and East Africa and suppressed rebellion in Iraq.

This work is well done with each separate campaign compartmented into its own chapter for ease of understanding. Good maps accompany the text. The book as a whole takes a chaotic and fast-moving period and makes it accessible for the student of the Middle East in World War II.

Our Tortured Souls: The 29th Infantry Division in the Rhineland, November-December 1944 (Joseph Balkoski, Stackpole Books, Mechanicsburg, PA, 2013, 386 pp., maps, photographs, notes, index, $26.95, hardcover)

Stackpole Books is known for its detailed accounts of the European Theater in World War II, whether on land or in the air and from both sides of the fighting. This book relates one of the toughest periods for the U.S. Army's 29th Infantry Division, during the Allied attempt to reach the Rhine by Christmas 1944 and hopefully end the war.

The 29th Division was a National Guard unit made up primarily of outfits from Maryland and Virginia. It fought its way ashore at Omaha Beach on D-Day and had been in near continu-

Simulation Gaming

It's back to the skies again, guns blazing, with the follow-up to *Sid Meier's Ace Patrol.*

BY JOSEPH LUSTER

PUBLISHER	2K Games
DEVELOPER	Firaxis Games
SYSTEM(S)	PC, iOS
AVAILABLE	Now

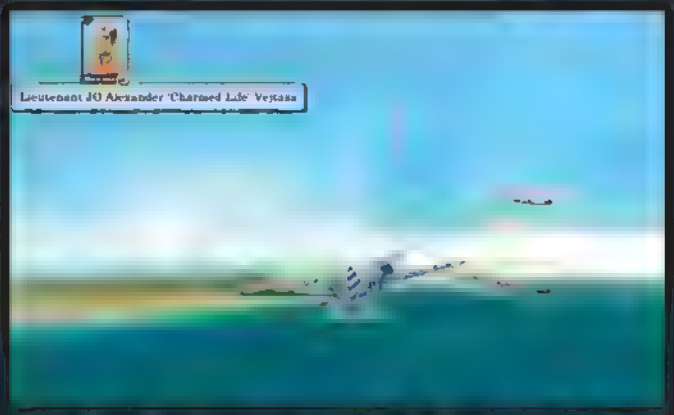
SID MEIER'S ACE PATROL: PACIFIC SKIES

It wasn't too long ago that we were taking the first *Sid Meier's Ace Patrol* game on a test flight via the iOS version, and now there's even more aerial action to dig into. *Sid Meier's Ace Patrol: Pacific Skies* doesn't tinker too heavily with the formula established by the last outing, but what it does change is notable enough to make it worthy of everyone's attention.

At its core *Pacific Skies* is exactly what its name implies: It takes the basic strategy gameplay of *Ace Patrol* and puts it in the Pacific Theater setting. If you played the first one you'll feel right at home here, with turn-based combat from developer Firaxis Games (*Sid Meier's Civilization V*, *XCOM: Enemy Unknown*) that's not unlike that of some of their previous efforts. Positioning and maneuvering your plane just right is just as important as lining up and pulling off shots properly, and it's easy to get into a groove and lose countless hours to something that started off as a simple and quick session.

So yes, *Pacific Skies* is just as easy to pick up and play as the original, but more subtle changes underneath that frame make all the difference. While *Ace Patrol* had four factions to choose from, this one cuts it down to two: the Americans and the Japanese. Choose from the Army or the Navy, each with their own bonuses, and dive right in. Going deeper, planes damaged during combat retain that damage until they're periodically healed, so players can no longer rely on repeatedly using the same pilots. It's a shame, as I was quite fond of that tactic, but forcing less lazy selection of pilots is never really a bad thing.

Pilots can keep up to four planes a piece in *Pacific Skies*, and once you get a new one you'll be able to hop



back in the cockpit of a previously owned aircraft, as well, allowing for the development of teams that specialize in certain objectives. This go around also sees the addition of Ace Skills, which lets pilots with the "teacher" skill pass on maneuvers to a wingman. This feature alone creates an interesting additional layer of strategy and preparation for those who want more than the pick-up-and-play experience *Pacific Skies* offers at face value.

Most importantly, though—at least as far as I'm concerned—is the lack of a free-to-play structure. This is hands down the best move the team could have made for *Pacific Skies*. While charging for content in small portions in the original seemed fine in theory, stuff like that often just leads to a disjointed experience that changes from player to player depending on how much they felt like investing. Dropping the microtransactions and going with a standard premium model that delivers the goods up front was a great idea, and according to Sid Meier, we're not alone in this line of thinking.

In an interview with IGN prior to

ous combat since. It had taken nearly 100 percent casualties in its infantry regiments, meaning all three units had replaced their contingents from June to November 1944. Despite this, the division was assigned to take part in a new offensive beginning November 16.

Designed to open the heart of Germany and the Rhine region to Allied assault, it required the 29th to advance 10 miles, cross the Roer River, and take the city of Julich, Germany. Three weeks later, the advance ground to a halt on the west side of the Roer. The division had suffered 2,600 casualties but was unable to seize all its objectives due to stiffening German resistance and bad weather.

The book is full of detail and covers the actions of generals and privates alike. The author is known for his detailed accounts and does not disappoint here. The book is obviously the result of extensive interviews and meticulous research. For those interested in the European Theater, it is a valuable story of the 29th Division between the hedgerows of Normandy and the frigid hell of the Bulge.

Resurrection: Salvaging the Battle Fleet at Pearl Harbor (Daniel Madsen, Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, MD, 2013, 241 pp., photographs, notes, index, $26.95, softcover).

One of the lesser heralded engineering miracles of World War II was the recovery of the U.S. Pacific Fleet's ships sunk at Pearl Harbor. It is well known that many of the battleships lost on December 7, 1941, were later raised, refitted, and returned to duty, generally as fire support ships for amphibious invasions. Exactly how this happened has been only briefly touched upon until now. This book corrects that deficiency.

The story begins in the immediate aftermath of the Pearl Harbor attack. The harbor was slick with oil, and bodies were still being pulled from the water and from the capsized hull of the battleship USS *Oklahoma*. The fleet had been dealt a serious blow, but within days the Navy began to recover. A salvage organization was created to refloat ships that could be rebuilt and strip anything useful from those that could not. The shattered battleship *Arizona* was almost immediately written off; the partially sunk battleships *California* and *West Virginia* and other ships were salvageable. Getting them off the muddy bottom of the harbor would be no small task, however.

A horde of divers, engineers, and sailors came together to perform one of the unsung engineering miracles of the war. Badly damaged ships were patched, drained, refloated, and send to drydock. They had to be cleaned of oil, saltwater, rotten food, and the decomposed bodies of the fallen. Ships with multiple bomb and torpedo holes were made ready to fight again.

This work is fascinating and detailed, though it is technical in nature and a technical understanding of warships will help the reader. It is well researched and contains many small details of the salvage process and the difficulties involved in carrying it out during wartime, when resources were stretched thin. Many photographs from the period help explain the ingenuity and hard work involved in the process.

The attack on Pearl Harbor has been well documented elsewhere; this book rounds out the aftermath of the first battle of the Pacific War, where lost ships were actually brought to life again.

the game's launch, Meier said it was something many fans of *Ace Patrol* wanted. "One of the messages we got loud and clear from fans was that they were more comfortable with the premium model," he said. "'Give us all the content and don't dribble it out piece by piece.' For less than what it would have cost to get all the content for the first *Ace Patrol*, you'll be able to get everything from *Pacific Skies*. That way we can make the game and we don't have to worry about how to introduce in-app purchases. It turns us into game designers instead of salespeople."

See, isn't it nice when everyone listens to one another? *Ace Patrol: Pacific Skies* is another fine example of the payoff that comes along with caring about and responding to consumer feedback, and as a result we have a stronger game overall.

TANK OPERATIONS: EUROPEAN CAMPAIGN

The latest in WWII combat is heading to PCs thanks to Kalypso Media. *Tank Operations: European Campaign* busts out some classic turn-based strategy action, with players taking on the role of a World War II field marshal throughout 12 campaigns. *Tank Operations* offers up over 50 units to do battle with AI opponents across land, air, and sea, and it should be available as a digital download by the time this issue is in your hands.

PUBLISHER
Linked Dimensions GbR

DEVELOPER
Kalypso Media

SYSTEM(S)
PC

RELEASE
Now

Long-time fans of strategy games will likely feel right at home with *Tank Operations*' hexagonal map. Kalypso's game aims to represent a handful of historical battles, from troops touching down in northwestern Africa to the final battle for Berlin. We'll have to see how well these operations are pulled off when we get our hands on the final version.

COMPANY OF HEROES 2: TURNING POINT

PUBLISHER
Sega

DEVELOPER
Relic Entertainment

SYSTEM(S)
PC

RELEASE
Now

While it's no surprise to see more from Relic Entertainment's real-time strategy game *Company of Heroes 2*, the recently released free expansion, *Turning Point*, has something more interesting up its sleeve. Along with standard additions like new multiplayer maps—Rails & Metal is designed for 2-4 players while Lazur Factory delivers strategy action for 6-8 players—the World Builder is the more significant update.

Turning Point's World Builder is interesting enough in and of itself, making the multiplayer maps more like icing on the cake. The feature lets players create maps, four new multiplayer commanders, and public chat lobbies. It's not like map creators are a unique concept, but it's always interesting to see what's brewing creatively within those who have stuck with a game since its release. Hopefully *Turning Point*'s World Builder yields some impressive results as folks have time to acquaint themselves with its interface. ■

Continued from page 33

should remain a secret in order not to undermine morale. Survivors were driven to sealed camps and warned not to breathe a word about what had happened. Eugene Carney, a 4th Infantry Division quartermaster, reported, "We were told to keep our mouths shut and taken to a camp where we were quarantined. When we went through the mess line, we weren't even allowed to talk to the cooks." Doctors were told not to ask questions when burned and wounded men reached military hospitals.

The genial, chain-smoking Ike had many worries in the weeks before the planned invasion, but now it was clear from the E-boat attack that the Germans had located the exercise and could easily infer the real Allied objective. Rumors were rife that one of the E-boats had scanned the waters with a searchlight and that several had cut their engines and hauled prisoners aboard. Among the missing were 10 officers who knew "BIGOT" security details of Operation Neptune, the naval phase of Overlord, and it was feared that if any had been captured the crucial D-Day element of surprise would be lost. Navy divers were sent out to retrieve dog tags, and eventually all 10 men were confirmed dead. SHAEF (Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force) censored the incident to avoid alerting the enemy to its importance.

The security scare was ended, but not all of the dead in the Channel could be accounted for. Fearing the possibility of detection, SHAEF kept a close eye on the Ultra intelligence system to determine if the Germans were making any changes in their defenses that would indicate knowledge of Allied intentions. Within a week, Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler ordered that the Normandy coast be closely monitored and new defenses prepared. It turned out that these moves did not result from the Lyme Bay debacle.

The Slapton Sands exercise, with its death toll of 749, caused great alarm in the Allied military hierarchy. Ramsay called it "a flop" with "much to criticize," and the U.S. Army's official history recorded that "almost everything went wrong with this putative combined operation."

Yet, if Slapton Sands reflected poorly on the American training and state of readiness for the imminent Normandy invasion, it also brought an indictment against the Royal Navy. Citing muddled communications, inadequate escort, and "an unfortunate series of oversights which began before the ships even left port," a top-secret report charged, "Much of the blame for the high death toll in Exercise Tiger must lie

Briton Ken Small raised this Sherman tank from its watery grave at Slapton Sands and dedicated it a memorial to those soldiers who lost their lives during Operation Tiger.

with the Royal Navy staff at Plymouth.... The American LSTs were given incorrect radio frequencies, preventing contact with the Royal Navy.... The ships were carrying much more fuel than they needed for the exercise, so many of the men in the water suffered terrible burns."

To safeguard the Overlord assault, General Eisenhower clamped a veil of secrecy over Operation Tiger. This was lifted in July, a few weeks after the June 6, 1944, invasion, when a SHAEF statement revealed what had occurred off Slapton Sands. Charges were made later of a cover-up by Ike and the War Department, although accounts of the tragedy eventually appeared in several publications, including official Army and Navy histories.

Nevertheless, in the subsequent weeks and months, the incident went unreported. Front pages, radio broadcasts, and newsreels focused on the Allied armies landing triumphantly on the five Normandy beaches, struggling through the tangled bocage country, liberating a delirious Paris, and pushing on eastward through France, Belgium, and Holland to the German border. The dead of Slapton Sands seemed to have been forgotten and denied their place in history, and the mystery of what happened there lingered. Many of the GIs' bodies were never found, although some Devonshire residents reported having seen U.S. troops burying corpses in an unmarked grave in a farm field. Questions were raised but went unanswered for several years

Wounded victims of Exercise Tiger had been treated at a U.S. Army field hospital in Dorset. The doctors and nurses were never told the causes of the men's injuries and were ordered to maintain secrecy under threat of court-martial. One of the doctors there, Ralph Greene, who later became a Chicago pathologist, decided several years later to learn about Slapton Sands. Publishing his findings in the February 1985 issue of *American Heritage* magazine, he wrote, "When most of the remaining secrets of World War II were lifted in 1974 through the Freedom of Information Act, the entire story [of Operation Tiger] became available, but nobody bothered to report it."

One wintry day in 1969, Slapton innkeeper Ken Small took a stroll along the windswept, crescent-shaped strip of coast after a severe storm had shifted shingle and stones. The burly former Royal Air Force corporal and policeman, who had moved south from Yorkshire in 1968, made a startling discovery. "All the shingle and stones had been washed away from the beach," he reported, "and I started finding spent and live cartridge shells, shrapnel, U.S. Army insignia, and men's gold signet rings." Although he did not know it, he had stumbled upon relics from Exercise Tiger.

Three years after he had found the Slapton Sands relics, Small was told by a local fisherman that there was a submerged tank a mile offshore on which trawlers regularly snagged their nets. With his curiosity heightened, Small hired a diving team to investigate. Sixty feet beneath the English Channel surface, the divers located a U.S. Mark V Sherman medium tank of the 4th Infantry Division's 70th Tank Battalion. With its 75mm gun facing the shore, it had rested there since the fateful night of April 27-28, 1944. A decade later, on May 31, 1984, the tank was finally hauled to the surface—just before the 40th anniversary of D-Day. Small recorded the event on videotape, which he readily showed to visitors at his inn.

Continuing to probe into the mystery of Slapton Sands, Small learned that the tank's five-man crew had survived. So, in 1985, he attended a reunion in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, of the 70th Tank Battalion, and met the tank commander, Orris Johnson of Leeds, North Dakota.

The innkeeper's crusade, meanwhile, prodded American officials into action, and Representative Byron sponsored a resolution calling for a memorial to the Slapton Sands dead. It passed Congress in January 1987, and a commemorative plaque was cast in Colorado to be placed near Small's tank.

Finally, at a rain swept, 40-minute ceremony on November 15, 1987, the memorial was unveiled by Defense Department officials, Byron, Devonshire councilors, and Army officers. Small tearfully placed a poppy wreath on the plaque, a local band played the old Anglican hymn, Amazing Grace, a U.S. Army color guard presented arms, and a bugler sounded taps.

Michael D. Hull is a frequent contributor to WWII History *on a variety of topics. He resides in Enfield, Connecticut.*

You deserve a factual look at . . .

Myths About Israel and the Middle East (2)

Should we re-examine endlessly repeated clichés?

In a previous installment in this series of clarifying messages about Israel and the Middle East, we examined certain myths which, by dint of constant repetition, had acquired currency and acceptance. We looked at the myth of "Palestinian nationhood," the myth of Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") being "occupied territory," the myth that Jewish settlements in these territories are "the greatest obstacle to peace," and the myth that Israel is unwilling to "yield land for peace." And we cleared up the greatest myth of all, namely that Israel's administration of the territories, and not the unrelenting hatred of the Arabs against the Jews, is the root cause of the conflict between the Arabs and Israel. But those are not all the myths; there are more.

What are more of these myths?

■ **Myth: The Arabs of Israel are a persecuted minority.**

Reality: The over one million non-Jews (mostly Arabs) who are citizens of Israel have the same civil rights that Jews have. They vote, are members of the Knesset (parliament), and are part of Israel's civil and diplomatic service, just as their Jewish fellow citizens. Arabs have complete religious freedom and full access to the Israeli legal, health and educational systems – including Arabic and Muslim universities. The only difference between the "rights" of Arabs and Jews is that Jewish young men must serve three years in the military and at least one month a year until age 50. Young Jewish women serve for two years. The Arabs have no such civic obligation. For them, military service is voluntary. Not too surprisingly, except for the Druze, very few avail themselves of the privilege.

> "It is in our national interest that reality, not myths, govern our policy."

■ **Myth: Having (ill-advisedly) already given up control of the Gaza Strip, Israel should also give up the administration of Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") because strategic depth is meaningless in this age of missiles.**

Reality: Israel is a mini-state – about half the size of San Bernardino county in California. If another, even smaller mini-state were carved out of it, Israel would be totally indefensible. That is the professional opinion of 100 retired U.S. generals and admirals. If the Arabs were to occupy whatever little strategic depth Israel has between the Jordan River and its populated coast, they would not need any missiles. Artillery and mortars would suffice, since Israel would be only nine miles wide at its waist. Those who urge such a course either do not understand the situation or have a death wish for Israel.

■ **Myth: If Israel would allow a Palestinian state to arise in Judea and Samaria it would be a democratic state and would be totally demilitarized.**

Reality: There is no prospect at all that anything resembling a democratic state could be created in the territories. There is not a single democratic Arab state – all of them are tyrannies of varying degrees. Even today, under partial Israeli administration, Hamas and other factions fight for supremacy and ruthlessly murder each other. Another Lebanon, with its incessant civil wars, is much more likely. The lawlessness and chaos that prevail in Gaza since Israel's withdrawal is a good prospect of what would happen if Israel – foolishly and under the pressure of "world opinion" – were to abandon this territory. As for demilitarization, that is totally unlikely. Because – with Syria, Iraq, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, most of which are in a declared state of war with Israel, at its borders – an irresistible power vacuum would be created. Despite pious promises, the arms merchants of the world would find a great new market and the neighboring hostile Arab countries would be happy to supply anything else that might be needed.

■ **Myth:: Israel should make "confidence-building gestures" for the sake of peace.**

Reality: What really is it that the world expects Israel to do for the sake of peace? Most of the 22 Arab countries consider themselves in a state of war with Israel and don't even recognize its "existence." That has been going on for over sixty years. Isn't it about time that the Arabs made some kind of a "gesture?" Could they not for instance terminate the constant state of war? Could they not stop launching rockets into Israel from areas that Israel has abandoned for the sake of peace? Could they not stop the suicide bombings, which have killed hundreds of Israelis and which have made extreme security measures – such as the defensive fence and convoluted bypass roads – necessary? Any of these would create a climate of peace and would indeed be the "confidence-building gestures" that the world hopes for.

Countless "peace conferences" to settle this festering conflict have taken place. All have ended in failure because of the intransigence of the Arabs. President Clinton, toward the end of his presidency, convened a conference with the late unlamented Yasser Arafat and Ehud Barak, the prime minister of Israel at that time. Mr. Barak offered virtually everything that Arafat had requested, except the partition of Jerusalem and the acceptance of the so-called refugees, their descendants having swollen from the 650,000 who fled the nascent state of Israel during the War of Liberation, to an incredible 5 million. Arafat left in a huff and started his infamous intifada instead, a bloody war that has cost thousands of Palestinian and Israeli lives. Israel is America's staunchest ally and certainly its only true friend in that area of the world. It is in our national interest that reality, not myths, govern our policy.

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final offensive

Continued from page 59

very proper" ceremony at 82nd headquarters at Ludwigslust.

One critical surrender remained, the Germans in Holland. On April 27, Seyss-Inquart, while refusing to yield, agreed to allow Allied food convoys into the German-occupied areas, and RAF Bomber Command and the U.S. Eighth Air Force, freed of having to bomb enemy targets, began dropping millions of rations close to Rotterdam and The Hague in Operation Manna. The massive food deliveries prevented starvation in the Netherlands by a matter of two or three weeks.

Now, with the overall surrender in place, the Germans had to yield in accordance with Montgomery's directive. General Johannes Blaskowitz, commanding German forces in the Netherlands, drove to a battered hotel in Wageningen to surrender to Lt. Gen. Charles Foulkes, who commanded the 1st Canadian Corps, and Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands. The corps' war diary recorded, "The terms of surrender were read over by General Foulkes, and Blaskowitz hardly answered a word. Occasionally he would interpose with a demand for more time to carry out the orders given to him, otherwise nothing was said from the German side. They looked like men in a dream, dazed, stupefied and unable to realize that for them their world was utterly finished."

There was a further surrender at Aurich, where Brigadier Jim Roberts, commanding the Canadian 8th Infantry Brigade, had to assist with the surrender of German forces facing General Guy Simonds's 2nd Corps. There was no conversation, and General Erich von Straube, nicknamed the "Little Watchmaker," gave up what was left of his 84th Corps to the dour Simonds.

After the ceremony, Roberts had to drive the Germans back to their headquarters, and for 20 minutes they rode in silence. Then von Straube tried to break the tension, asking Roberts what he did before the war. "Were you a professional soldier?" Straube asked, hoping he had given in to a fellow full-time warrior.

Roberts was stunned and unsettled by being asked about a world at peace, which seemed an "improbable dream." He only looked at the surface of the question. He said, "No, I wasn't a professional soldier. Very few Canadians were. In civilian life, I made ice cream." □

David Lippman is a frequent contributor to WWII History. *He also maintains a website dedicated to the daily events of World War II.*

USS Hadley

Continued from page 69

Okinawa anchorage, provisioned, and taken in tow by the tug ATA-199.

With a reduced crew, the ship was towed 7,000 miles at an average speed of seven knots, stopping at Saipan, Eniwetok, and Pearl Harbor before the two-month odyssey ended on September 26, 1945, at Hunter's Point Naval Shipyard near San Francisco. Along the way, the Hadley skirted a typhoon and the towline parted nine times.

The gallant Hadley never went to sea again. On November 7, 1945, she was decommissioned, and on the 28th she was stricken from the U.S. Navy roll. Her entire service career had lasted less than two years. On February 11, 1947, the rusting hulk was sold for scrap. Somehow, it seems that such a heroic ship deserved a more fitting fate.

Mullaney and Lieutenant Patrick H. McGann, the Hadley's gunnery officer, received the Navy Cross for the picket line battle, while seven members of the crew received the Silver Star, and seven the Bronze Star. More than 100 Purple Hearts were presented. The entire crew received a Presidential Unit Citation.

Perhaps, though, in summing up the superhuman effort of his crew, Commander Mullaney paid greater tribute to the ship and her complement than any medal or other acknowledgment could.

"No Captain of a man of war ever had a crew who fought more valiantly against such overwhelming odds," Mullaney wrote. "Who can measure the degree of courage of men, who stand up to their guns in the face of diving planes that destroy them? Who can measure the loyalty of a crew who risked death to save the ship from sinking when all seemed lost? I desire to record that the history of our Navy was enhanced on 11 May 1945. I am proud to record that I know no record of a Destroyer's crew fighting for one hour and thirty-five minutes against overwhelming enemy aircraft attacks and destroying twenty-three planes. My crew accomplished their mission and displayed outstanding fighting abilities. I am recommending awards for the few men who displayed outstanding bravery above the deeds of their shipmates in separate correspondence. Destroyer men are good men, and my officers and crew were good destroyer men." □

Michael E. Haskew is the editor of WWII History. He is the author of numerous books and articles on World War II and other historical topics and resides in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

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A US Ensign flown on the American Landing Craft LST 493 from the 6th June 1944 to September 1944, a souvenir collected by gunnery officer Lt C.M.Page, the flag frayed.
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A rusted German WW2 Helmet painted in white 'Found at Omaha Beach, France, 1958 Lt H.Caroll'.
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A collection of three French resistance Armbands (maquis, partisans and FFI), given in late August /early September 1944 to an OSS Agent operating with the Resistance, two of them signed by 14 members of the Resistance including Rene Brunel.
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